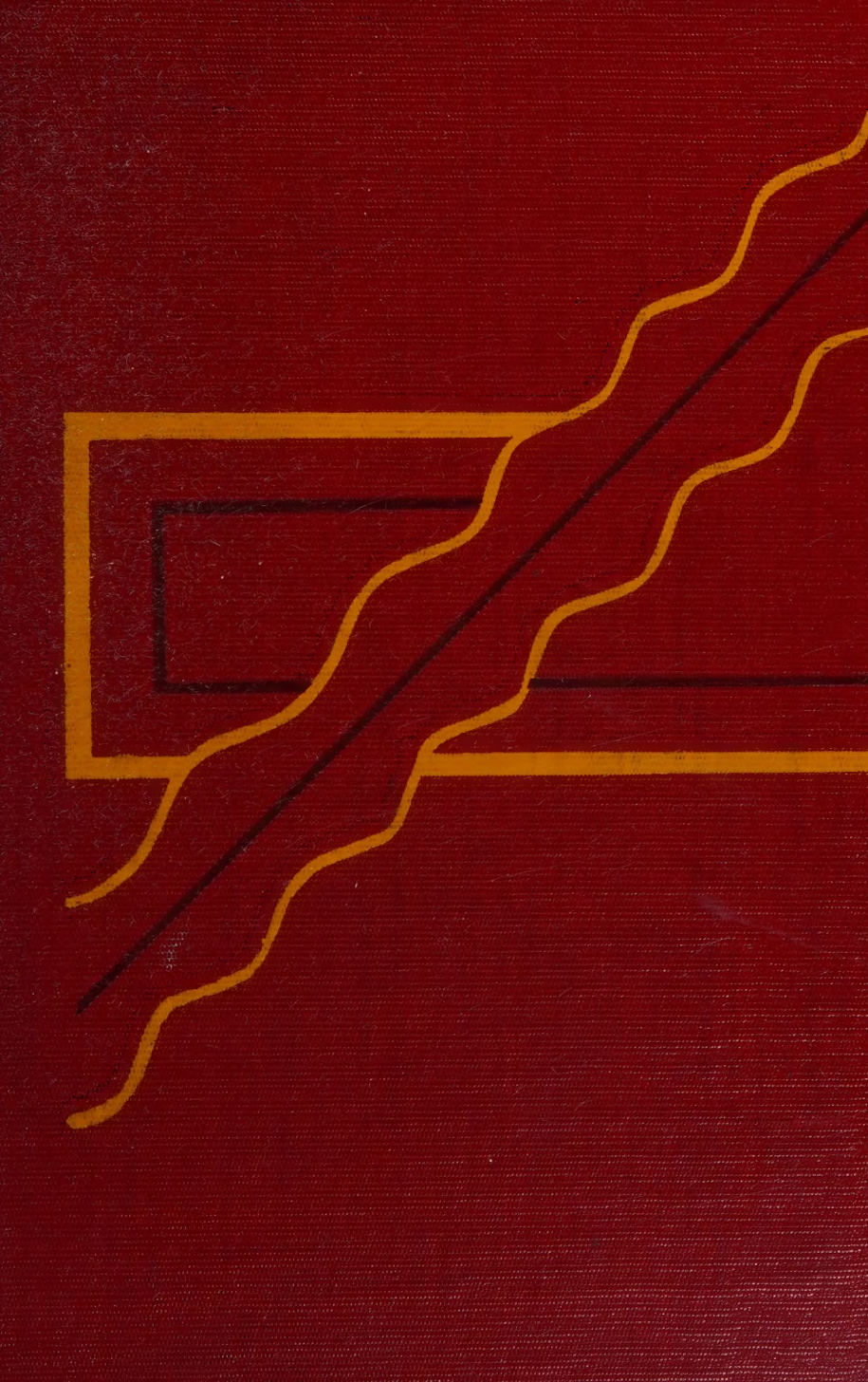

SAWDUST AND SOLITUDE

BY

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Edited by

COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1928

PORTLAND

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Published March, 1928

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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A PREFACE TO A LIFE

One naturally would expect an autobiography to be complete: needing no added statement or explanation. However, this story of certain almost inconceivable chapters in the life of a woman is by no means encompassed in the usual scope of an autobiography as the term is commonly applied. Instead, it deals only with the high lights of an existence, a portion of a lifetime, in fact, in which the range of events engages a period of not more than twenty years.

It is not, therefore, the ordinary recital of the incidents of a life; rather it is an extremely bizarre cross section of an existence where elements seem to have tangled in a perfect tempest of what may seem, upon the surface, to be mere adventures, but which, upon deeper study, reveal themselves as the struggles of a queerly temperamental nature to find itself, its peace, happiness and contentment without ever reckoning the cost. Lucia Zora's story, to the writer of this preface, seems as unusual in its quiet and contentment following the turbulence which preceded it, as any possible adventure which she may have had upon the hippodrome track or within the dangerous, claw-ridden zone of the steel arena.

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It was fifteen years ago that I met Lucia Zora for the first time. A neophyte in the precarious occupation of luring persons within the tents of the circus by the wiles of press-agentry, I had gone to that place of squatty buildings, rambling sheds, clanging blacksmith shops and busy carpenter rooms known as the winter quarters of the Sells-Floto Circus, in Denver, Colorado, to gather the material for stories which I would later attempt to foist upon the city editors of various papers in towns where we were to exhibit. On the way, with natural newspaper instinct, I had queried the owner regarding some outstanding figure about whom I could weave the necessary human interest to engage the attention of said editors; perhaps an equestrienne; perhaps some old clown following a life of jollity even from the days of Dan Rice; perhaps some unusual animal or outstanding exhibit. The show owner had answered me briefly.

"See Zora," he had said, and with that statement had turned to other topics as though in those two words he had solved my entire problem.

Within a white painted ring set next to the menagerie house, a group of elephants waited in line under the guardianship of a smiling little blond man, whom I came to know as Fred Alispaw, the Menagerie Superintendent. Tremendous beasts they were, eight or nine of them, ranging from the bulky Frieda, of some five tons avoirdupois, to

the mammoth Snyder with his three-foot tusks and massive head, towering above the rest of the herd in a ponderous dominance which seemed to dwarf his hulking companions. Upon the tops of the freshly painted wagons beneath the drying sheds, for spring was nearly here and the last of the parade paraphernalia was being made ready, a few workmen and lesser performers loafed in waiting for the rehearsal of the "bull", or elephant act, which was to form one of the features of the coming performances. At last the door of the menagerie house opened and a woman strode forth, her heavy bull whip trailing in the dust of the winter quarters yard as she approached her gigantic actors. A powerful woman, both in physique and in the mental dominance which became apparent with the first glance at her clear-cut features, her tight-fitting costume of high-laced Roman boots, black silk tights, Hussar coat of black and gold, revealing the Junoesque proportions of a body which instinctively reminded one of the fabled Amazons. Yet her symmetry, her small, graceful ankles, the well formed, distinctively feminine hands, the clear-skinned, peachblow complexion and wealth of golden chestnut hair all the more accentuated by the darkness of her garb — these things made one forget the strength, the power of the shoulders, the lazy virility of the sinewy arm, now idling the bull whip along the ground,and remember only the

fact that here was a beautiful woman whose face showed the unmistakable evidences of birth and breeding, and whose clear blue eyes spoke of an extraordinary intelligence. A woman whose appearance bespoke complexities; dominant, willing to face all and dare all, if by so doing an object might be attained; with the strength, the courage, the resourcefulness to pit one's self against adversaries before which men might quail, yet wholly a woman, to be frightened by a spider and cry for sympathy at the prick of an embroidery needle.

Such was Zora when first I saw her, a woman who gave hint of certain mysteries, outstanding among her feminine companions of the circus, eaten by ambition, yet caring nothing for its reward, jealous of her position as the star performer of a tremendous organization yet dreaming constantly of the day when she could leave it far in the background and become a nonentity upon a patch of ground, with the applause departed, the music of the band stilled forever, the glare and the glamor gone.

At first I thought that her obsession for the soil was merely a pose, something new in the way of press agent tricks that there might be another picture in the paper, another mite of publicity added to the grand total, another group of admirers augmenting those who applauded her from the grand stand. But as the years passed and the friendship between Zora and myself deepened, I learned

differently. In the heart of this woman who sang arias from "Faust", from "La Giaconda" and "La Bohême" as she went about her dangerous work of the arena, who could quote from practically all of the classics with a glibness which suggested the professional elocutionist, whose entire background was one of study designed to fit a person for contact with the higher reaches of the world, was the definite germ of the pioneer which would not be downed. It is comparatively easy to dissect the reasons for the happenings of a lifetime by viewing them in retrospect. Lucia Zora evidently was born with a firm ingrain of those typically American characteristics which demand that the wilderness be conquered and that the suffering of to-day be counted as nothing if foundations can be laid for a to-morrow which the builder may not even live to see.

The rewards of the pioneer are but scant, indeed, if looked upon in the mercenary sense; he struggles, he strives, he endures and suffers, and the end of life finds him only broken and weary, too tired from his endless endeavors to enjoy that for which he has fought so bitterly, and gaining his sole recompense from the knowledge that he is passing the fruits of bitter struggle on to others. That one should deliberately turn to this from the glamor of the spotlight and the roar of the audience sounds almost unbelievable, especially when the person is a woman. Yet when one studies the life of Lucia

Zora it becomes more logical, for, upon closer inspection, the adventures of the arena become more than physical ones; they are adventures in psychology, the outcome of an insensate urge seeking to find expression, and leading, by a labyrinth of actions, to a final and definite purpose where, its object attained at last, a mind and soul may be at peace. It is my firm belief that Lucia Zora only thought that she wanted to be a circus performer. She only believed that she was making herself happy by accomplishing her daring deeds in the arena and on the hippodrome track. Her desires to train the Nubian and the Bengal came about only through the misinterpreted demands of the oldest of human urges, and once this urge became plainly evident, the thrills of the lion den were as nothing. For, its real quality at last realized, she who once had faced physical oblivion for the reward of a pay check and the glory of applause, gladly endured dangers that were far greater, and mental enemies far more vicious in their insidious attack than ever were contained in the claw-fringed menace of a leaping tiger, the dripping fangs of the leopard or the lion, or the crashing impact of an elephant stampede, that she might view the beauties of a sunset over a land which, by her own hands, she had helped to wrest from the wilderness.

COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

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SAWDUST AND SOLITUDE

CHAPTER ONE

Perhaps there was an ironical significance which my parents did not realize, in the fact that I was named for a tramp steamer swinging at anchor in Boston Harbor. My father, being somewhat of a sportsman and traveler, was returning from the Arctic in order to be present at my advent into the world when he saw the old boat and noticed the name upon her prow. It struck him as both musical and unusual; when he reached home and found that his hopes for a girl had been realized, he suggested it as the cognomen which I was to carry through life, little realizing, naturally, how true to my namesake my life would be. For I have seen the buffeting of many tempests; cross currents and strange channels have been my lot; my destiny seemed shaped for the sailing of many an uncharted sea before I could at last come to the haven of a home port.

Naturally I write these things in retrospect; when one is in the actual accomplishment of exciting adventures or violent deeds one sees little correlation and certainly no bearing in these events upon what may later come to pass. But now, contented after many a year of both physical and

emotional strife, I sometimes find myself wondering if my existence were not a fairly well ordered one, after all. It does seem strange, however, to consider that the happiness gained from the sight of a waving field of growing grain might have had its roots in the crash of an elephant stampede, the snarl of the tiger or the hiss of a maddened leopard; in the roar of a leaping lion or the frenzy of a circus lot, its maelstrom of humanity milling in the terror of a tornado.

The wandering instinct was upon me early, taking the form quite naturally of a desire "to go with the circus." An investigative child, and by my predilection to stray from home, more than the usual source of annoyance to watchful parents, I wandered, one day when I was about five, down the shady street upon which stood our home, in the sleepy little upstate town of Cazenovia, New York. The sound of brass-throated music came from a distant street and I hurried there to stand with other children, watching the meager parade of a small wagon show. The clown fascinated me, the horses were beautiful, the performers held for me the same magic lure that they would possess for any child, but the one thing that stood out above all others was the elephant.

Judging from the standards of to-day, which demand a far greater state of health and well-being than was usual in exhibition animals some years

ago, that pachyderm was perhaps but a poor representation of the elephant world. Childlike, however, I took but little notice of the cracked skin, the gauntness of the neck and the stiffness of joints resultant from age and the hard work of forming the motive power of practically the whole circus. Consciously or not, this elephant became for me the personification of dreams which are natural to childhood: far-away places, strange, mysterious happenings, adventures, and fields of golden fulfillment, just beyond the horizon. From this it may be gained that I was already a "tomboy."

I followed the elephant as far as the circus grounds and then with its disappearance into the menagerie tent returned home, where, procuring a yardstick, I went once more to the street, where I measured the print of the gigantic beast where one remained undisturbed in the dust. Then back in the carriage barn, my measurements to aid me, I drew a childish outline of the footprint upon the floor, treasuring it in months to come as another child might treasure a doll or a picture book. Naturally, with every period of worship before this incongruous shrine, my thoughts became more firmly welded toward ambitions of the circus. Perhaps had a swift-sailing ship, scudding before the wind, engaged my attention at that time, my ambitions would have been as strongly of the sea; or had a covered wagon lured me with thoughts of its

destination, my circumlocutory course might have been straightened into a more direct path.

My parents occupied a position in the world then known as "comfortably fixed." Their ambitions for me took the usual line. I would be given the best education which they could afford, my natural talents would be heightened and I would be made ready to become the educated and accomplished wife of some good man, according to the dictates of the average conservative American home. Against this cut-and-dried existence I instinctively rebelled even before I had reached my teens; I felt that when the time came I would find a life more to my liking. This life, in my imagination, heightened by a self-hypnosis which had been in steady progress ever since the far-away day when I had followed a circus elephant, would be that of an animal trainer. With natural parental pride, my father and mother had decided that my voice, a clear soprano, should be cultivated, and I studied as they dictated, taking my endless exercises and lessons in breathing, but with never a thought of using that voice beyond the limits of speaking. The same was true in my other studies; I endured the "amo, amas, amat" of Latin, the intricacies of French and the guttural sounds of German; I struggled through the theological course which Cazenovia's Seminary dictated, and pounded energetically at the piano under the tutelage of a patheti-

cally conscientious music master, all with no idea whatever of putting these things into the practise of later life. At nineteen my opportunity came. I ran away to the circus.

Perhaps one more generous with the facts would say that I drifted to what is known as "the land of the white tops." The truth is that I ran away, coldly, deliberately, burning my bridges behind me, with a clear knowledge of what I was doing. My voice had gained me a position in a light opera company and I now was traveling with it by consent of my parents, who, looking upon a position in opera as a distinct achievement, viewed my real ambition as equally as great a disgrace. We were in New Orleans. A circus was there also. They could use another woman in a position known in the circus world as "generally useful." That meant dancing in the ballet, riding in the grand entrée, appearing as the background for other acts, riding *ménage*, by which is meant the manipulation of the high-school horses, which often are trained by an experienced horseman and then turned over to the women of the circus, owing to the canny knowledge of the circus man that the feminine performer is far more popular than the male. I had hoped that by gaining this position I might speedily progress to one in which I would have some connection with the performing animals. In this, however, I was thwarted by two excellent reasons. One was that

the menagerie was under the command of a man who neither desired women trainers nor believed that any feminine performer could possibly develop herself into a position of control over wild beasts. The other was that the show, in the vernacular, "went broke."

Another and less enthusiastic person would have allowed this experience to effect a cure. Practically moneyless, stranded in a strange city, friendless, my position logically should have resulted in a telegram for the fare home and a thorough repentance. I did not even think of home. Instead, I bought an amusement magazine, gained from it the names of various circuses, to which I wrote ardent letters of application, and then, that I might live in the meanwhile, went to work at the task of frying flapjacks in the window of a second-rate restaurant. I remained there until another chance came and I could go again with a circus, once more "generally useful." Years that were comparatively uneventful followed, unless one considers the danger of the hippodrome races, the adventures of the circus in wind and storm and rain, the injuries attendant upon a crash in the chariot races when, four speed-maddened horses plunging before me, I was catapulted into the seats by the breaking of a wheel; unless one counts as events such things as train wrecks, the frenzied cry of "fire" in the darkness of night, the slash of shattering canvas and the

dancing of wind-jerked quarter poles in the grip of a hurricane, those years were unpunctuated by anything save the commonplace, as I dragged along, one of many performers in the big top, my ambitions toward the training of animals still far from realized. In fact, it was not until a circus romance entered my life that I found myself truly on the road to the fulfillment of a childhood ambition.

I had been on the Sells-Floto Circus with him for more than a year. He knew that I was Lucia Zora, a "generally useful" actress, and I knew that he was Fred Alispaw, one of the men "working on elephants." That was all. The season came and went—and a new one arrived. With it arrived the information that I was to take a position I had occupied before on other shows, that of riding the leader of the elephant herd during parade. It was good news to me—eager as I was to be near animals, particularly elephants. How good it was even I did not know, for seated on the head of the old elephant as we made our first parade was the newly promoted menagerie superintendent, Fred Alispaw.

We became acquainted, and with our first conversation, I made known my love of animals. It led to other meetings, gradually resolving itself into a sort of "professor and pupil" arrangement, by which I went into the menagerie every afternoon to learn from the superintendent the things I craved to know: little stories about the natures of caged

animals, their habits, peculiarities, and methods by which they were trained. A natural sequence followed: friendship, love, and finally the reception of a marriage proposal while seated on a bale of hay behind a lion cage!

However, it really was more romantic than it sounds. For more than a week, Fred Alispaw and myself had been endeavoring to save the life of a malformed lion cub, suffering from rickets. Each day, during my "lesson hour", it was a part of our duties to minister to the stricken baby, until the wasting little thing became to us almost like a human child, and we watched over it with the care that a physician would bestow upon a dying infant.

One afternoon the end came. I had the cub in my arms, and Fred and I were seated on a bale of hay behind a den of roaring lions. He had been massaging the beast's muscles, and suddenly ceased.

"Seems to me he's mighty quiet," he said.

I looked down. The eyes were glazed, the skin drawn from the tiny teeth.

"Why, Fred!" I exclaimed. "He's dead!"

Then the tears came. A second later, I felt an arm go about my shoulder.

"Don't do that, Zora, please don't," came in pleading tones. "I — I just can't bear to see you cry."

Then, with a dead lion cub in my arms, I heard a man tell me that he loved me, and rather dazedly,

I admit, heard myself answer that his love was reciprocated. Six weeks later, we attempted to elope — for weddings in the circus are riotous affairs. We managed the ceremony very well, but in some manner the information became known. That night, as we made ready to take our positions on Old Mom, the leader of the herd, for our entrance in tournament, pretext after pretext was made to delay us, until finally we rushed for our places at the last possible moment, to be boosted to the back of Old Mom so hastily that we failed to notice much of anything save the fact that the procession was starting. But conditions changed rapidly.

We entered the tent, to find the audience suddenly boisterous. Fingers pointed. Children yelped with merriment. I looked somewhat vacuously toward my husband, bobbing before me on the elephant's head, and he, in turn, stared as blankly at me. Then I happened to glance toward the rear!

Tied to Old Mom's tail, and dragging in the wood chips of the hippodrome track, was the greatest collection of old shoes that I ever had seen, while behind us marched a clown collection of a minister, a groom, a clown-faced bride, carrying a beautiful bouquet of cabbages, and flanked by her bridesmaids and flower girls, daintily distributing "flowers" of carrots, onions, potatoes and spinach in the path of the happy "bridal couple", while accompanying clowns pointed up at us, and with their

mimicry sympathized in turn with both Fred and me. About this time I became aware of the fact that Old Mom was carrying a banner, and leaning over the side of the howdah, I saw:

LOOK US OVER! JUST MARRIED!
BRIDE AND GROOM!
JUST MARRIED! JUST MARRIED!

Following this, I became aware of still other things; that in addition to the old shoes, Mom's tail bore a large, kittenish bow of white, while her enormous legs were decorated with white ribbon bows also, to each of which was attached a cow-bell — for the wedding bells, of course. And no sooner had we become aware of this than —

The Wedding March by the circus band — and deluges of rice! Scattered every ten feet around the entire hippodrome track were canvasmen, each with a big bag of it, intent upon showering us! The audience, of course, roared with merriment, and I learned what it really meant to be a circus bride.

But at that, I had little time for details. As soon as the tournament was over, the boisterous circus crew promptly kidnapped my husband, hid him somewhere around the show train and held him prisoner for three days. Not even the management could find him, much less his new and frantic wife!

CHAPTER TWO

NATURALLY, when again I did find my missing husband, I prepared to step at once into the realm of animal training. Fred thought otherwise.

"Wait a while," he cautioned. "Spend the winter in the menagerie house and really study animals. You haven't even scratched the surface yet!"

Months later, I admitted the truth of his statement. It was on a chilly morning in Denver when Fred was called from bed to winter quarters, only to summon me shortly afterward. I found him, in the gray of dawn, standing in the steam-heated menagerie house before a permanent den in which lay a Bengal tiger, its eyes glassy with fever, its poisonous claws distended, its breathing labored and painful.

"Pneumonia," my husband announced shortly. "Afraid we're not going to save him. But we'll try. Get to the nearest drugstore and buy the ingredients for an old-fashioned 'draw'."

I hurried to the pharmacist's, to return with yards of bandaging, and a large can of mustard. Then, with the assistance of the menagerie helpers, we secured the great beast with ropes, our hearts aching at the pain we caused the unfortunate brute in tying and spreading his claw-studded paws, and

proceeded to place the plaster on his chest, as a like application would be applied to the breast of a human being.

It was while I was bandaging the gasping cat that I noticed a splotch of red on my husband's coat sleeve and hurriedly turned again to survey the tiger.

"We've hurt him in some way," I announced, "he's bleeding."

"No—that's myself." Fred snapped it. "He got me."

I pulled back his sleeve. The forearm was laid open from the elbow nearly to the wrist, the muscles and tendons visible! I gasped.

"Fred — cauterize that! Those claws — !"

"Got to try to save this cat's life first," came laconically. "He's in more danger than I am. Hurry up with that poultice!"

It was not until half an hour later, when the poultice had been put firmly in place, and the animal released from his bonds, that Fred would consent to look after his own wound. Even then, he did not take the time for a visit to a physician, but emptying a bottle of iodine into the claw-torn flesh, he gritted his teeth, submitted to the pain of bandaging, then went back to his charge. And there are persons who say that animal trainers have no hearts, no sympathy!

All day we remained with the stricken beast,

eating only what was brought to us by the menagerie attendants. Until late night we stayed beside the cage, at last to see our every effort fail. A final gasp — dullness of the eyes — the beautiful Bengal was dead! Fred straightened like a conscientious physician who has lost a hard-fought case.

"Well," he said despondently, one hand stroking his forehead in a nervous manner, "I guess we did all we could. How nervy are you?"

"Enough, I suppose. Why?"

"I'm going to perform an autopsy. Could you stand to help me?"

I assented and he hurried to a property trunk, returning with a set of dissecting instruments. With the aid of the night watchman, the four-hundred-pound Bengal was carried to a heavy table. There, in the light of the menagerie arcs, with the cat beasts pacing their cages nearby, the elephants fretting at their picket line, and the monkeys and chimpanzees and orang-outangs chattering at the scent of the incisions, we performed the autopsy upon the dead tiger, to determine whether my husband's diagnosis had been correct.

It was by such practical methods as these, during the months of winter, that I really learned animals, — the dosing of colic-stricken elephants with paregoric and Jamaica ginger; the daily temperature-taking and care of a tuberculosis-stricken chimpanzee; the curing of indigestion in cat animals;

the exercising of cubs afflicted with rheumatism. When springtime came again, I could qualify as a practical nurse for the afflictions of almost any animal. All this, incidentally after a three weeks' siege of nursing my own husband, for the iodine had not reached that arm in time. The poison of the dying tiger's claws had seeped into the life stream, with the result that blood poisoning had set in, and for a time threatened the necessity of amputation.

Fred's injury had not in the slightest deterred me from my desire to work with animals. The mental attitude of a trainer is greatly like that of any other person engaged in a highly dangerous occupation. Until the first injury actually happens one labors under the misapprehension that though misfortunes may come to others in the same calling, they will not strike home. Then, when the attack does occur, another queer quirk of the mind asserts itself, announcing that while one slip did happen, bringing injury in its wake, there will never be another. As an example of this, I know one animal trainer who bears upon his body a total of four hundred and eighty-eight scars, evidence of some ninety-five attacks by beasts in the course of training. Yet so great is that optimistic strain which keeps animal trainers within the steel arena, that he can still confidently say that he has experienced his last accident and that there never will be another.

However, there was one thing which Fred's misfortune brought forcibly to me, and that was the need for a home, with things in it which we could call our own, — a place to tie to in case of greater misfortune. Before this, I had looked upon the interest of the various performers in their abiding places of the winter as something rather puerile. Some had little farms, which they rented during the summer months in exchange for their care and a portion of the crops; others had houses in the city. Home plays a tremendous part in the thoughts of the circus performer, possibly because he is so homeless. The circus season often begins in early March, lasting sometimes as late as November. During that time there are only a few periods in the entire season when a stay of more than twenty-four hours is made in a given place. On the contrary, the usual procedure for a circus is to arrive at dawn, unload, hurry to the circus grounds, and begin its feverish preparations so that by one o'clock it may be ready to receive the crowds thronging to witness the matinée performance. It is only between the hours of one and five o'clock in the afternoon that a circus is really stationary; even while the performers are eating their evening meal, which begins as soon as the matinée performance is over, about four-thirty o'clock, the work of dismantling commences. And before the night crowds have started to the circus grounds that circus is on the

move. The cook house, or mess tent, has already been taken down, packed, and is on the way to the railroad yards, that it may be loaded for its journey to the next town. The same is true of the horse tents, the blacksmith shop and other accessory tents of the show. The menagerie, with most of its animals, departs shortly after the night performance begins; when the show is over, there remains only the side show, waiting to garner the few stray coins from laggards of the home-going throng, the big top, where the performance has been given, and the dressing tents, where performers rush madly about their packing lest the canvas be pulled down over their very heads. In such a life there is little time for association along the way. The circus person must needs be, for a greater part of the year, essentially a nomad, his every possession contained in his trunk or upon the tiny shelves above his bunk in the sleeping car. For this reason, a love of home is all the stronger because it is a thing denied; ambition takes the form of a little cottage, or a small farm on which to spend declining years. But until the time of Fred's accident, nothing of the kind had ever entered my mind.

An experienced woman of the wardrobe department was the one who brought it to my attention. Before this time I had been perfectly content, in circus parlance, "to live in my trunk." No idea of home or home-making had ever occurred to me;

domestic science had been sadly lacking from my curriculum in Cazenovia and what of it I had gained since had come from my restaurant experience during the time I had been stranded, and from brief contact with a chafing dish, or the little oil-stove, which, at that time, formed a portion of every performer's complement for the heating of water and irons or the cooking of makeshift meals after the performance, or when the show train was making an extraordinarily long jump. The wardrobe woman's conversation, however, was along more permanent lines.

"Dearie," she said, as she worked one day on my costumes for the coming season, "everybody in the circus business should have a little home, ready for them to go into at any time. A person never knows, in the show game, when you are going to have to say good-by to it. Maybe it'll be a wreck in the night or a smash-up on the hippodrome track, or a blow-down that'll fix you so you've got to quit trouping. That's when you'll appreciate a home that's been paid for and is waiting for you when the crowds don't want you any longer. A little farm somewhere, dearie, that's what you want, so that the land will support you when the circus is through doing it."

Under the influence of Fred's injury, I took the advice as seriously as it was possible for me to accept anything of this nature. I talked the matter

over with Fred, and finding him of the same mind, began my preparations for the day when we might be forced to retire. During the period of Fred's convalescence, we took excursions about Denver looking at houses here and there, or strolling into the outskirts to examine some small tract of land or truck farm advertised in the daily papers.

The city houses interested me not at all; the farms had a strange influence which I could not diagnose; an uneasy feeling which left me thinking about them long after we had decided against the purchase. It is hard for me to describe that sensation; it was as though I were groping through a dark room in an effort to find something, when I did not know where it reposed or even the exact object for which I searched. A fleeting reaction, it came and went, leaving but little definite effect. Because I thought I wanted a home I began to prepare for it with the pursuit of an idea which soon became more of a hobby than the actual making of plans. This took the form of collecting linens; Fred and I were drawing excellent salaries, and my every saving went toward the amassing of linens of every description, some of which would not have been out of place in the home of a millionaire. Many of these pieces I still have, untouched. One in particular is a tremendous banquet cloth, some six yards in length, designed to furnish the napery of a venison dinner, perhaps in the hunting lodge of an Allegheny

sportsman or, mayhap, a game breakfast by the membership committee of a hunting club. Certainly it was nothing that possibly could be used by any person under ordinary circumstances; the glassware, china and silver service necessary to complement a cloth of this kind would have cost at least five thousand dollars. It was the type of linen demanding solid silver, cut crystal, Sheffield plate for the serving of tremendous courses of game, and china and other appointments in keeping. I have eaten many venison dinners — as well as breakfasts, luncheons and between-meal "snacks" since circus days ended — but they were partaken of from oilcloth covered or plain deal tables while my Commercial Club tablecloth lay undisturbed, creasing with the years.

Other purchases were of a like type; I bought without the slightest idea of the purpose for which these things could be used. I knew that a home demanded linens, and that was about all. This hobby was mingled strangely with the reading of farm magazines, in which I paid great attention to the articles on the raising of chickens, the breeding of stock and the growing of crops, passing by the information on the kitchen and the culinary duties of a farmer's wife, without so much as even a glance. It was as though I were a man, commissioned to make ready for a rural home, buying blindly for the household and preparing only for

those things in which a man is interested. Soon "Zora's linens" and her farm magazine became a topic of conversation about the circus, at last to find their way into print, through the efforts of the show's press agent. Newspaper men interviewed me regarding it and the vagueness of my replies often was taken as the evidence of a mere desire for publicity. But the real truth was the fact that I did not know myself what I really was seeking.

CHAPTER THREE

At the time of Fred's injury, this indefinable land obsession was of course only in its beginnings, mingled with and subdued by the excitement engendered by the promise of being "broken to animals at the first opportunity." This chance came sooner than either of us expected, with the augmentation of the menagerie by a pair of twin baby elephants, expressed direct from Ceylon.

The little beasts were only a year old when they arrived, and not quite a yard high. In fact, they still were being nursed on a diet of milk, bran and honey, and Keeda Bonna, a Cingalese keeper who had accompanied them to this country, watched over them like a mother with twin infants. The result was that the babies had their own way, going where they pleased and when they pleased, while an excited Cingalese squawked dolorously in their wake and made no impression on them whatever.

However, funny as it might be, there was another angle to it all which Fred could see, and which worried him — the fact that a pachyderm's life often is gauged by its babyhood. An elephant infant which is allowed its own way becomes spoiled, just as a human baby will become spoiled, and the

influence of this is felt all too often in his later years. He becomes headstrong, "heady" we call it, and sometimes rebellious, with the result that he takes the place of an "agitator" in the herd, filling the same position there that the soap-box orator in the public park fills in our daily lives, that of inciting calmer persons to radicalism. It therefore was with a good deal of relief that Fred heard one day that Keeda Bonna had become homesick and desired to return to India. Hurriedly my husband purchased tickets and accommodations, then, once Keeda Bonna was on his way, I became nursemaid to two refractory baby elephants!

In this, I had my own ideas, and my husband allowed me to map out my own course of instruction, the first lesson of which I knew to be a knowledge of discipline. I began with a system of rewards. When I came to the circus lot each day with offerings of fresh milk and new honey, I refused its distribution until each elephant should submit, for a time at least, to be fastened by one leg to a tent stake. In a month, simply because their food depended upon it, they were reformed beings. It required nearly all the rest of the season to make them "hook wise", or obedient to the touch of an elephant hook, by which all pachyderms are guided. Then, with our arrival in winter quarters, came the real work of training. It was an arduous affair.

One cannot teach an elephant to lie down as one would a dog or a monkey. He's too heavy. It is a matter of blocks and tackles — and patience, both on the part of the trainer and the trained. Yet that trick is necessary, if for nothing else than the daily brushing off with a broom, by which the pores of the skin are kept open and the health of the beast maintained. Naturally, this was my first job with Kas and Mo — and such a task!

That is, with Kas, at least. Mo was entirely different. With a sling attached to his front and hind legs, he permitted himself to be thrown on one side several times, while I, beside him constantly, repeated the command over and over: "Down, Mo, down!" On the fourth attempt, Mo obeyed the signal of his own accord, and the sling was not needed again. Not so with Kas.

The idea simply would n't permeate that heavy skull. Time after time the sling was put into position, the front legs of the elephant drawn forward and the hind legs backward until the beast lost her balance and went to the ground; then I, sitting on her quivering thigh, rewarded her with praise and petting and with candy and lump sugar. Kas ate the sugar and dainties and absorbed the praise — but steadfastly refused to do anything more. A week went by, then two and finally three before the idea finally sank in. After which all Kas wanted to do, seemingly, was to practise that act, repeating

it of her own accord for minutes at a time, meanwhile squealing her delight at having at last learned her lesson!

A "head stand" was next on the training program, and with Fred at my side to direct me, I began my work. Again a carefully padded block and tackle was used, the trunks of the animals being fastened between their legs to teach them to hold their heads down, and the back legs raised by means of a tackle on each hind foot. Nor was it as difficult as it sounds. Only three things were necessary.

One of these was the surety that every fastening was padded carefully so that no pain whatever could come to the animal. That is a barred word with the true animal trainer. Confidence and the pleasure of accomplishment are the sure means of fastening any lesson in a beast's brain, not pain.

The second necessity was the constant petting and reassuring of the beasts, and the immediate reward for the slightest progress. The third was repetition, to fasten the trick firmly in the beast's brain and also to strengthen muscles hitherto used but seldom. All this accomplished, these twins taught me a trick of their own!

Each day I made it a habit to bring them a loaf of bread from the cook house as an especial treat, and their joy over that daily "dainty" was close to ecstasy — so easily is an elephant pleased.

Straining at their chains as they watched my approach, they soon developed the habit of lifting one foot and then the other, in quick succession, as though they were dancing. It gave me an idea, so I placed the little animals upon pedestals, where, in response to light touches of the bull hook, first upon one foot, then another, they did their dance, this time as a part of a performance. Soon I added sleigh-bell bracelets, each tuned in a different key, and the accompaniment of "Turkey in the Straw", with the result that by the time spring came, the twins had added a grotesque dance to the five or six other tricks which I had taught them.

In the principal one of these "sagacious feats", as the circus announcer called them, the twins were hitched tandem to a cart — the wheels of which were connected into a mass of flowers — and driven into the ring, where they went through a routine of marching, walking across bottles, the "lie down" and "sit up", while still in harness; then, quickly stripped of the cart, they went into their pedestal work where they did their dance, then were driven to the ring exit in a "pyramid", the front feet of Kas resting on the hips of Mo.

It was a different style of elephant act — and the news of anything out of the ordinary travels swiftly in the circus world; originality is scarce in the show business. One day, H. H. Tammen, the show's owner, and I held a very important

conference, following which a new bit of gossip traveled, as though by wireless, from one circus to another. A woman actually was going to attempt to handle "the big herd!" That was news!

All for the simple reason that it never had been done before. True, there had been women who had appeared with elephant herds, to pose in a musical number, perhaps seated on the elephant's back, or upon an extended leg, while the trainer himself put the animals through some simple routine, but so far no woman alone ever had succeeded in working an entire herd.

In it all there lay an ample reason, — that of sex. A woman, by instinct, is timid, and animals seem to have a strange ability to discover the failings of the person who seeks to train them. Then, too, there is a second drawback, that of a lack of study and a lack of knowledge of each individual beast, and a further lack of constant concentration of thought and effort.

Naturally this lack of concentration all too often has its basis in a lack of distinctive personality. The animal, and particularly the elephant, takes advantage of this. Elephants can be lazy, as human beings can be lazy, and when one sees a chance he only half does his work. Unless the woman who seeks to train him is dominant, he succeeds in shirking his performance; the woman becomes disheartened and in the end gives up her task,

announcing that she cannot "get anything out of the beasts."

Even the first step in elephant training, with a woman, usually results in failure, through the fact that she does not possess the strength to carry it through, and that is in the handling of the bull hook, with its attached whip. Instead of the vibrant crack of the lash, by which the elephant is ruled, although that lash never touches him, there is only a faint pop — and an elephant obeys only that which creates respect. It is the same in comparison as the respect imbued by a 44-caliber revolver and a cap pistol. So the people of the show world, especially the women, told me that I would fail in my new task. Half a hundred dire things were predicted for me — all of which I considered, but gradually, one by one, cast aside.

I felt sure of myself. Naturally of strong build, the active life which I had led during my years with the circus had given to me a strength which some men might have envied. I was one hundred and sixty pounds of strong bone, muscle and sinew, of a type better described as masculine strength. The usual softness of feminine flesh was wholly lacking; by this I do not mean that my muscles bore the bunchiness of masculinity, for I pride myself, with the vanity that belongs to all women, that they did not. But they were strong in the same sense that a man is strong, with the power of

endurance, and the grip in my hands was sufficient to crack an elephant whip with even more ferocity than could my husband. Natural feminine grace had been given me, combined with the strength gained from holding in four plunging horses in the chariot races, from constant riding, and the strain of holding one's self in position in the rocking howdah atop an elephant's back along the countless miles of daily parades, an agility and speed of action that would be invaluable in the training arena. My stage training had imparted what is known as a "presence", the ability to keep my mind upon my work and the audience at the same time, thus never overlooking the opportunities for a graceful pose; they say that a true actor remembers the audience even upon his deathbed. In addition to this the qualities of determination and the dominant personality which had given to me the stick-to-itiveness to pursue my ambitions of the circus through childhood years, would stand me in good stead, and beyond these qualities I had little or no physical fear. So I laughed at the predictions of failure, and studied the plans which had been outlined to me by the lovable little owner of the show, — merely the idea of putting the big herd of eight elephants, aggregating a weight of more than thirty tons, through a routine of set paces. Following which, I made my decision and sought my husband.

"Fred," I announced, "I need your help. I want to put on the most spectacular elephant act in the show business!"

He stared.

"Don't want much," came finally. "Spectacular acts are dangerous."

"Naturally. But I want it. I want to surprise the boss."

Again he was silent, at last to scratch his head quizzically, then to smile in unexplained fashion.

"All right, Sweetheart," came firmly; "you want an exciting act, do you? Well, you'll get it!"

CHAPTER FOUR

A LONG time afterward, Fred confessed to me that it was his desire to frighten me out of the truly dangerous desire to be more than a figurehead during the performance of the elephant herd. But I did not know that. At two o'clock that afternoon — the show was in winter quarters — I stood in costume beside the curb of a practise ring set up near the menagerie house, while one by one Fred led the great pachyderms forth and turned them into my keeping. I knew them all, and they knew me from more than a year of almost constant association, but this was the first time that I ever had sought to make them obey my commands.

For a moment I was frankly nervous, realizing that I, a woman, was about to attempt to assume command of eight beasts which, if they willed, could not only set aside my rule, but wreck everything in sight. The power of an elephant is almost inconceivable. He is the only wild animal which remains in captivity of his own free will. Chains cannot hold him when he decides to break them. His mentality, gauged from a standpoint of animal reasoning power, is almost one hundred per cent. His average weight is several tons, all of this a swift-working instrument of destructive

power when he decides to use it. The slightest blow of the end of his trunk, whisked for a distance of even six inches, can crush the ribs of a human being as though they had been struck by a sledge hammer. When I realized these things, something akin to stage fright began to creep over me — to be checked just in time. Then, before the thought could seize me again, I leaped into the ring, and, my bull whip cracking, began to shout my commands.

The elephants blinked and stared toward Fred. I pretended not to notice. A leap and I was at the head of Old Mom, to hook her gently and to pull her forward until she was trotting around the ring, the rest of the herd following. Just as suddenly I gave the command for her to halt, and she obeyed. I knew that I had won my first battle; if those elephants would obey one command from me, they would obey another. Fred waved from the ring curb.

"Good work! Now jump right into the routine."

Jump I did. I knew every move, every command, from having watched my husband perform the act every afternoon and night during the circus season. Once the start was made, everything was easy, and I finished the entire performance with little need for the assistance of Fred. He waved a hand in congratulation. Then:

"Not satisfied?"

"It's just the regular stuff that they've always done."

"Very well. You're the one to be satisfied. Get that blanket. Put it in the center of the ring."

I obeyed. He took the bull hook from me.

"Now, lie down."

I obeyed, and Fred turned to the herd of elephants, with his old air of ring generalship.

"Mom!" he shouted. "Forward! Knees! Down!"

Almost before I had realized it, he had brought Old Mom, the leader of the herd, forward and forced her into a crouching position above me, the heavy skin of her belly pressing gently upon my breast, the whole tremendous weight of her only held off me by her bent legs; a position of strain, which, if she should lower her weight, even for an inch, would mean death for me. I confess that I felt a bit nervous. Death, when it whizzes toward you in a swift accident, is an exciting affair, and one seldom thinks of it until afterward. But with several tons of elephant flesh crouched above you, and with your only salvation the docility of that elephant itself, one is prone to consider a great many things. But that was only the beginning.

One by one Fred brought the other elephants forward, pyramiding them until Old Mom formed the support for the whole herd and while I was, like the proverbial woman, "at the bottom of every-

thing!" A slip of any of the huge beasts, a misstep, a miscalculation on the part of Old Mom in holding her weight from me — any of these things might mean my end, and my teeth were tight-gritted as I lay there, listening to the scraping of the rough skin as the beasts crashed into place, the trumpeting and squealing of the huge mammals as Fred sent them, one after another, into different forms of the pyramid, and finally the loud swishing of their armor-like hides as they "broke formation" in response to Fred's command. Once again with free air above me, instead of tons of elephant flesh, I rose, relaxed, then sighed — the sigh of a person who has just come from prison. Fred grinned.

"How'd you like it?" he asked. I smiled in reply.

"It's a great trick, Fred. Only I'll have to have you in the ring on that one — I can't command the herd from under Old Mom."

His stare was one of frank amazement.

"Is that all the kick you get out of it — that I've got to be in the ring? I — " then he grinned boyishly — "well, if that's the case, I guess there is n't anything left for you but the wildest act in the world. If that's what you want, I guess I'll have to arrange it!"

Thus we started our training, and day after day, when the sun shone, we practised in the makeshift

ring, with minor accidents to mar our day, or accomplishments to brighten it, Fred working with me every minute at first, then gradually dropping into the background, that my mastery over my gigantic charges might be complete.

And some way, it all was as natural to me as life itself. I had hoped so long to be an animal trainer, I had studied the beasts so carefully, and been in their company so much, that when at last I did assume command, it seemed no step at all. Soon Old Mom and her herd obeyed me as completely as they obeyed Fred, and then we began working up our "big act", the first trick of which, incidentally, was for me to be seized in an elephant's trunk and whirled about with every bit of speed which the pachyderm could muster. It was fairly easy out there in the practise yard, but more than once Fred's forehead would seam with worry, and he would force the animal back into the center of the ring, whence it had progressed in its whirling motion.

"Remember, you're going to be working in a tent!" he would caution. "There'll be poles around you. If you ever crash into one of them, you're dead!"

A bit of useful advice. Time after time, in my act, I have missed a centerpole by the barest fraction of an inch, as the elephant temporarily lost judgment of its distance — but then, I'm still

alive, and I suppose that is all that counts. But to return to our "secret" training.

Of all the elephants of the herd, one appealed to me more than all the others, a gigantic beast, standing fully a foot taller than any other of my performers, and with long, sweeping tusks, — "Snyder", now notorious in the circus world as "Snyder, the Man-killer." To me he was the most magnificent specimen of elephantine flesh I ever looked upon. More than that, as I worked the herd, I noticed that he had a wonderful sense of balance, that during the pyramids, when it was necessary for the "bulls" to stand on their hind legs for a given space of time, it was Snyder who endured the strain best. It gave me an idea — to ride out of the ring on that elephant's tusks, the elephant himself walking on his hind feet. Fred told me that it never before had been accomplished by any trainer, much less a woman.

Together we set to work, first to build a high pedestal, and, this completed, to lead Snyder to it and command him into a "hind leg stand." Snyder obeyed, being able to hold this erect position, however, for only a moment. Time after time we sent him into this position, always facing him toward the pedestal, until at last the tired beast placed his front feet against it to rest. That was what we wanted. Then gradually, we taught him to stand there, and to take steps with his hind feet — it was the same

principle that so often is used in teaching a baby to walk! Animal training is not so difficult, after all, is it?

For several weeks this continued, not because Snyder had not learned what was expected of him, but for the strengthening of his hind quarters that they might bear the weight of his tremendous body in a long walk from the performing ring to the menagerie connection. Then, when his strength had developed sufficiently, the pedestal was removed, and a support made of a rope sling, which, placed about his trunk and pulled taut, gave him the slight balance necessary to keep him erect during a long session of walking. After which came the next step — that of walking alone.

In this, the rewards were heavy. One step and Snyder received a juicy carrot. Two steps and two carrots. Soon the crafty Snyder was on his hind feet and walking whenever the opportunity provided — and he always got the carrots. His capacity was great, and we were not niggardly with rewards, especially when they meant strong hind legs and a constantly growing sense of balance. Within two weeks, Snyder could cover the entire circle of the ring without the aid of his sling, and within two months more, he could traverse the whole quarters yard and back again! Then came the hardest task of all — to teach him to carry me on one tusk — for that upset his whole

theory of balance, with the result that he was forced to learn his lesson all over again, while the supply of carrots went steadily downward. Eight weeks passed before Snyder could control the extra burden of my weight — and then the circus opened.

Perched high on one of the reserved seats that afternoon in Albuquerque, New Mexico, a little show owner confided to a few friends that he'd persuaded Zora to take her husband's place in the ring as an elephant trainer.

"'Course she does n't do much," he announced — for our secret had been guarded carefully — "but then it makes a good flash — a woman handling a bunch of elephants. Besides that, she looks the part and — huh, here she comes now!"

Ten minutes later, that show owner had metamorphosed into a wide-eyed, gasping boy, oblivious to all the world except one thing. The woman "who would n't do much" had just finished the "lay down" under a herd of elephants, had reclined upon a carpet while every elephant in the herd stepped over her, then halted, and returned to position over her body, this time backward; she had stood on the head of an elephant as it reared from a position on all fours to a standing one on its hind legs; she had been whirled madly about in an elephant's trunk and now —

"Watch Lucia Zora," the announcer shouted, making up his "spiel" as he went along, "she

will now make her exit from the ring, riding on the tusk of the only elephant in the world who walks like a man, Snyder, the biggest performing pachyderm under canvas. The management offers $25,000 reward to produce the equal of this elephant and his marvelous woman trainer, the brave Lucia Zora. Watch her!"

Just then there came an interruption from the seats — where a wide-eyed show owner was shouting:

"You bet this circus offers that reward! But nobody'll ever take it. And listen — cut out that brave Lucia Zora stuff. She ain't just brave — she's bravest. Get that? The Bravest Woman in the World! What's more, the whole world's going to know it!"

Before the season was over, with banners screaming the announcements from the sides of buildings, with heralds flaunting the fact, with great "28-sheet stands" depicting me in the act of making my exit from the ring on Snyder's tusks, with my name before me in every direction I turned, I realized that the little show owner had kept his promise. It was what I had worked for and dreamed for, and I should have been happy in its accomplishment. But I was n't.

CHAPTER FIVE

The insensate urge which had caused the beginning of my collection of linens and the reading of farm papers was now taking more definite form. A circus goes to every portion of the country and for the average performer this means the delight of travel as it is commonly viewed by the ordinary human. The interim between the matinée and the night show is occupied by little excursions to places of interest: the bridge beside which stood the home of Barbara Frietchie, the battlefield of Gettysburg, the monument to those who died in the misguided Real rebellion in Canada, and the hundred and one other interesting spots by communion with which, the circus performer, unschooled though he may be in the common acceptance of the word, becomes possessed of an enviable education.

Fred and I joined many of these excursions, it is true, just as we were a part of the various picnics and clambakes which form a Sunday diversion when the circus takes its day of rest, or enthusiastic onlookers at the baseball games between performers and working men, a stand-by of every tented organization. But there were other times when we slipped off by ourselves. It had become

a fairly well settled matter that our home, when the time came for us to leave the circus, would be on a farm.

With this idea, real-estate offices, particularly those dealing in farm properties, became our goal in the various sections of the United States to which we traveled. We examined orange groves in California; we looked over the possibilities of the fertile Puyallup district in Washington and the apple orchards of the Yakima country; we stood among the peach trees of Georgia and discussed the possibilities of the life there; we wandered over the sandy stretches of the Rocky Ford district in Colorado, thinking of the time when perhaps we too might be the purveyors of watermelons and cantaloupes to a nation. We looked over farm after farm in the corn belts of Iowa and the great wheat districts of Kansas and South Dakota. We took our places among those who watched at berry-picking time in the sleepy, undulating Ozarks of Missouri. We strolled about the deserted farms of Connecticut, which then could be bought for little more than the proverbial song, while Fred dilated upon the ease with which the land could be brought to bear again. The son of a farming family, Fred had been reared among growing things; agriculture came naturally to him and I sometimes wondered why he did not force his views more into the foreground. As for myself,

there was something wrong with every place we visited. In but few cases was there a specific fault; I was continually in that state known as "picky"; often the only reason I could give to the disappointed real-estate man who had hopefully lugged us from prospective purchase to prospective purchase, only to result in failure, was that I did not like what he had to offer.

The strange part of it all was the fact that the more disappointments I found, the greater was my desire to search. I answered advertisements in farm papers; my trunk often was as heavily laden with descriptions of fruit tracts, dairy projects and the like, as it was with the costumes necessary to my performance in the ring, while the stories which the press agent carried to the papers often were as much concerned with my obsession for a farm as they were with my act and the performing qualities of Snyder, now becoming known as the greatest elephant ever shown in a circus ring.

Regarding Snyder, it is strange what beliefs will fasten themselves in the human mind, refusing all efforts to be ousted. To-day, in the circus world, the great Snyder is only a memory — and to many, an unpleasant one. His bony structure and hide are in a university museum, his name stands in the circus world for that of a vicious killer — to all but Fred Alispaw and myself. For we look upon Snyder as a creature of circumstance; we cannot

think of him as the beast they said he was, striving his best to wreck a circus when felled by a volley of steel-jacketed bullets on the circus lot at Abilene, Kansas, in 1920. But then, perhaps, we are prejudiced. We remember him as the Snyder of other days.

And what an elephant! Instead of the killer, he then was the protector, the savior of my life more than once, as we made our choppy way from the ring to the menagerie connection. He seemed to know the duty that had come to him. He seemed to realize also that should he ever slip or be forced suddenly from his standing position, I would be without protection and would be thrown straight under his heavy hoofs. And for that reason, rather than pitch forward with my weight, I have seen him take bruise after bruise on his heavy hips, as he bumped into poles or wagons or paraphernalia, only to grunt, then to go staggering along again, while the audience applauded, and while I gave thanks for a faithful, ever watchful elephant, upon whom my safety depended.

Thus do opinions differ, for in the show world they tell how, after I had left the circus and Fred Alispaw had ceased to be the constant guardian of the big "tusker", he came to hate a trainer, and sought to kill him. How at last he broke from his chains, overturned the hippopotamus den, crashed tiger and lion cages as though they were

so much matchwood, strove to kill another elephant whom he hated; how he held a whole circus at bay until at last he crumpled beneath the onslaught of volley after volley of steel-jacketed bullets, fired from army rifles. But in those other days —

A command and he would bow for me to leap to his tusk where I balanced myself. Then, like some great, unwieldy freight car suddenly come to life, his rough hide swishing and cracking, his deep-throated bellow sounding, he would rise to his hind feet and carry me out of the big top into the menagerie, as faithful and honest a piece of elephant flesh as ever existed. In fact, as the seasons progressed, and I sought anew for thrillers by which to make my act constantly fresh, it was always to Snyder and Old Mom that I turned, and they never failed me.

Elephants are queer beings. In spite of my intense prejudices in their favor — for I believe them to be the most intelligent beasts of all — I am forced to admit that there are traits about them which I am unable to comprehend. They are living paradoxes, these great, leathery animals, as uncertain as a willful woman, and just as destructive, once they really get started. They will display, in some things, the wisdom of all the ages; most of the time, they are sagacious to a degree. Yet, in other moments, they will be as skittish and

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foolish in their fears, in their likes and dislikes, as a spoiled child. Queer, is n't it?

Yet I believe there is an explanation for it all. An elephant is a giver; he puts everything he possesses into what he happens to be doing at that moment. There's no halfway about him, a condition which made my act with the big herd all the more dangerous. One of the tricks which I taught my charges was to whirl about rapidly in the ring, in time to the music of a waltz by the circus band. The elephants liked to do it so much, in fact, that they looked neither to the right nor to the left; their minds were bent on whirling, nothing more. It was often all that I could do to prevent being either crushed to death or knocked down and trampled by the gigantic beasts as they went through their gyrations. They were whirling; their minds were set on it, and a little thing like a collision or the smashing up of a trainer meant nothing in their lives. The result was that I was forced to leap and dance about that ring like a jumping jack on the end of a string, escaping one of the great brutes only to find another coming at me, or sliding into a safety zone just in time to miss being sandwiched between two of the hulking beasts when they would crash together with the noise of a pair of freight cars in a railroad collision. Time and again those impacts happened, with the result that more than once elephants were scattered

over the ring in all sorts of ludicrous positions, and groggily coming to their feet with a blank expression in their eyes as if to ask:

"Who in thunder hit me?"

Nor was it until Fred and I trained the beasts to occupy only a certain amount of space during their gyrations that any sort of system came out of it, and any sense of safety. Elephants are simply too enthusiastic. I think that's the best explanation.

For if an elephant loves you, he loves you with his heart, soul and hide. If he hates you, he puts the same verve and whole-hearted enthusiasm into that dislike. This, perhaps, may explain the story of Snyder, the Man-killer, and the best elephant in all the herd.

Snyder loved Fred and myself. There is no denying that. If anything, he loved Fred far more than he did me, for Fred had been his guardian and his teacher ever since the elephant was three years old. For us, Snyder would do anything, willingly and gladly.

The time came when we felt we must leave the circus. A new trainer took our place. Snyder liked him also and obeyed him. Then that trainer departed, and a third one arrived. Snyder hated him. What is more, he accepted only two commands, and the minute that the bull hook touched him, he was off! The result was an attempt to

wreck the circus which he had saved so often, a night of general Hades, and finally the necessity of killing one of the greatest pachyderms that ever has lived under a circus canvas. So goes an elephant's likes and dislikes.

Another thing — and one which has found its counterpart in the history of more than one human "criminal" — Snyder was blamed as a man-killer long before he ever went bad, because of a murder which he did not commit! It was merely a case of mistaken identity. Instead of Snyder, who is charged by nearly every one in the circus business as "having been a man-killer ever since Riverside", it was a dullard, the slow-wit of the entire herd, who did the slaying! Even animals, you see, are not exempt from unsavory reputations which they do not deserve.

It was a calm, indolent day, almost tropical in its temperature. The town was Riverside, California; the time about one forty-five o'clock in the afternoon. The "doors", or gates of the circus, had been open for some time, a part of the lazy crowd sauntering about the menagerie and hippodrome track, neighbors visiting neighbors, while the tiers of reserved seats were a wave of fans, punctuated by fleeting, white-coated candy-sellers, making the most of what circus concessioners call "a good juice day." In the menagerie tent, the lions and tigers lay panting in the darkest corners

of their dens, where they had stretched themselves in search of coolness; the elephants weaved and swayed fretfully at their picket pins, for extreme heat can make an elephant as irritable as it makes a human being. The whole circus was slothful; out on the midway the ballyhoo men droned their invitations to the side show, rather than barked them. Canvasmen and roughnecks slept perspiringly in the shade of the great wagons. Across the way from the circus lot, a filling station employee moved lazily about his work as the motor cars came and went, supplying them with gasoline from two 500-gallon tanks. A delivery cart drew up for fuel, and the driver, intent on good measurement, forgot his cigarette as he bent close to watch the flow. Instantly our little circus world became a bedlam!

The explosion fairly rocked the circus lot, setting the tents bellowing with the rush of air which came with the concussion, and sending every animal of the menagerie tent into frightened activity. The crowd leaped from its seats, nor heeded the cries of rushing circus people for order. Dense clouds of black smoke rushed down upon us; all in a moment, ours was a world of dashing forms, of cries and shrieks and bellowing, roaring beasts.

The danger was not from fire — it was from panic; and in a moment more, that danger was heightened. An assistant boss canvasman lost his head. Regardless of the fact that the menagerie

crew already had started to prepare the tent for dismantling, in spite of the knowledge that my husband already was fighting the elephant line into something resembling submission, having sent the most level-headed of the herd, Old Mom and Trilby, chained together to prevent a break-away, to the task of moving the cages and dens into the open, he rushed through the tent, his arms swinging flail-like, his hoarse voice bawling:

"Everybody out of these tents! Out of these tents! We're going to burn down!"

Then the panic started! Out from the big top came the circus crowds, yelling and struggling in their fight for safety. The four elephants which still remained at the picket line, Floto, Snyder, Alice and Frieda, could stand it no longer. They had remained obedient after their first fright of the explosion — but now yelling, panic-stricken humans told them that the world had gone awry. When others fled, they must do likewise! They trumpeted. They surged and twisted, while frantic elephant men, under the direction of my husband, strove in vain to hold them in line. A stake cracked, then another, and a third and a fourth. The elephant line was free; one lunge and they headed for the out-of-doors, knocking tent poles and cages from their path, and started at express train speed for the open country.

It was useless to attempt to follow them on foot.

A hundred yards and Fred gave it up, to whirl to his assistants, give an order for the runaways to be trailed as rapidly as possible with Mom and Trilby, that the recalcitrants, when found, might be "mingled" with these calmer elephants and restored to something resembling reason. As for Fred himself, he had no time for this duty. His was to find those runaways as quickly as possible, and to do everything in his power to prevent the destruction which a stampeding pachyderm inevitably wreaks.

A rush to the stock tents and to the saddling of the swiftest horse on the circus — then the chase began. For half a mile the course led in a straight line toward a neighboring orange grove, and Fred began to have hopes of a recaptured herd. In vain. A half mile farther within the line of trees, the tracks diverged in all directions, while, far at one side, a tremendous runaway squealed and scrambled as she tried to climb a clay embankment which bordered the grove, literally digging her footholds in the hard clay as she strove to ascend the pitch. Frieda had been found — but there was little joy in the discovery. It meant that the other three had gone on, and that the delay in capturing Frieda — for Mom and Trilby, with their attendants, had not yet arrived — would mean more time for the other three recalcitrants to wreck the countryside. Fred halted.

"Frieda!" he shouted, as one would call to a runaway child. "You get down out of there! Hear me? Get down!"

And Frieda, squealing her happiness at the sound of a friendly voice, came down! Five minutes later, she was chained to Mom and Trilby, while once more Fred took up the chase.

The trail of one runaway led to an irrigating ditch, where from the lathered condition of the mud and the murkiness of the water, it could be seen that something the size of a small house recently had been playing there. Fred swam his horse across the stream, in reality the size of a small canal, and a few moments later shouted another command. For there was Snyder, in the midst of an orange grove, contentedly stripping the golden fruit from near-by boughs, and apparently forgetful that there ever had been a panic. At Fred's shout he turned, gazed dolorously at his master, gathered a trunk-load of oranges as a boy would gather an armful, and with a bored expression submitted to being led back to Mom, Trilby and Frieda. There remained at large now only Floto and Alice, and once more, the four elephants in his wake, Fred started on his search.

But this time the chase was longer. Two miles and Fred stopped at a farmhouse.

"Seen anything of any elephants around here?" he asked of an excited man.

"No!" came the angry answer, "But I'd like to see the man who owns 'em!"

Whereupon a childish voice piped up, as a girl ran forward:

"Oh, Papa! You did too see 'em. Mister, they tore up the whole chicken yard, and one of 'em ran away with a chicken house on its back!"

It was laughable afterward, for Alice, in tossing into the air a chicken house which had blocked her path, had in some way hooked it over the bony protuberances above her ear, and careened away like a kittenish fat woman with a slanting piece of millinery. But at the moment, with the damage suits mounting, there was no humor!

CHAPTER SIX

A HUNDRED OR SO automobiles had gathered on the roadway by this time and Fred, leaving his tired horse, accepted the first proffered assistance, starting his chase anew by machine, but only for a short distance. There was Alice, squealing with rage, the chicken house demolished by this time, but her whole aspect that of an elephantine Gulliver. One chicken yard had not been enough. She had emerged from her first venture into a whole chicken farm, there to tear up pens and runways, fences and houses until brought to a standstill by her own damages. She was a network of chicken wire, twisted over her head and trunk and about her legs so that it was necessary to cut her loose with nippers before she could be chained to a tree to await the rest of the herd. Following this came tragedy.

The trail of Floto had led in a circle. Far into the country he had gone, there to swerve and at last make his way back to the main thoroughfare of the town. Whether he had become peaceable again and merely wanted to return to the circus never will be known, for with almost his first movement came trouble. Evidently bewildered,

he had started through the wicket gate of a yard and on toward the house with its open front door. A woman sat on the veranda, reading, and suddenly looking up at the sound of an unwonted noise, saw an elephant coming toward her. She screamed, and then in self-protection seized her chair, to beat off the beast. One blow of the intruder's trunk demolished the weapon and knocked the woman prostrate. Then the elephant whirled around on a new course. One giant hoof raised and fell. The woman was dead, crushed by the weight of the animal as Floto himself sought flight!

Now he was indeed mad — with the madness of fear! A horse and buggy blocked his path as he reached the street. The elephant crashed straight onward, killing the animal instantly and heading for the crowd of excited persons who had assembled in his wake. A figure leaped forth — that of the legal adjuster of the circus — armed with a rifle. He fired, the bullet taking effect in the elephant's trunk and adding to his excitement. The beast did not even swerve, but, as the crowd dissolved before him, headed straight onward, crashing through the plate-glass window of a barber shop, wrecking the interior, then plunging on out through a rear door, taking the entryway and a part of the wall with him!

The crowd surged after him. A hotel blocked

his path. Straight through the windows of the lobby he went, knocking down pillars and crashing chairs and lounges like so much matchwood, heading then through an archway into a music store where pianos, phonographs and musical instruments almost immediately became only so much tangled wood and metal and wire; whereupon he went through another plate-glass window and across the street into the welcome darkness of a livery stable. There Fred found him, smashing to bits the buggies and "hacks" which came in his path, his eyes clouded with the effects of his temporary insanity, his mind unable to assimilate the commands of a keeper whom once he had implicitly obeyed. It was a lone fight.

Fred would allow no one else near him. One daring man against a maddened elephant, he dodged the rushes of the infuriated beast, driving the bull hook into his trunk, and then hanging on, while the big animal whirled him about like a weight at the end of a piece of string. When this failed, he hid in the darkness until Floto should forget him in demolishing another vehicle, and then crawled forth behind the beast and sought to lasso one of the big legs with the chains that were being passed him from without. An hour of working and scheming and fighting; at last the beast stood motionless, his legs crisscrossed with chains, his wreckage at an end. For ten minutes Fred left

him in quiet and darkness. Then slowly, carefully, he led the rest of the herd within the barn.

I believe implicitly in a language of animals. The docile members of that herd squealed to the man-killer and trumpeted, as though endeavoring to assure him of his safety, while he merely stood and stared at them, his glazed eyes seemingly unable to recognize his old companions. One of these who sought to calm him was Snyder, who, through mistaken gossip, is blamed to this day as "the bad bull of Riverside", while in truth, all he did was steal a few oranges!

For a quarter of an hour this effort on the part of the herd continued; then suddenly it seemed to dawn on Floto that he was among friends. He trumpeted in return. Fred waved a hand:

"Loose the ends of those chains!" he ordered, and with the action, Floto turned and backed into his place in line, obedient once more, ready again to be taken to his regular place in the picket line. But I appeared in no performance of the elephant act that night. It was too risky — not for myself, but for the circus. That afternoon's sally cost exactly $17,000.

So, from this, it is easy to see why the working of an elephant act was a dangerous piece of business. Dependable they might be for three hundred and sixty four days of the year. But on the next — ! I believe I know. I have seen ten stampedes. More

than that, I have seen elephants mad with the blood lust, and at one time I fought for the life of a broken, bleeding victim, my husband! It happened with Kas and Mo, those twins!

As I have mentioned, Kas and Mo started out in the world under the terrific handicap of being "spoiled." Keeda Bonna, their Cingalese "nurse", had allowed them to do exactly as they pleased, and that is the worst thing in the world for a performing elephant. The result was that, in spite of the fact that when this trouble happened, Keeda Bonna had been gone from the circus for years, his influence still remained and those elephants still had the idea, tucked far back in their brains, that they wanted to do only what they wanted to do and when they took the notion. That idea brought trouble.

Fred and I did not believe in using the same acts every season. We felt that in spite of the old adage that a circus is always the same — which it is n't — we should be thinking constantly of different stunts and different tricks for our charges, with the result that every winter, when the circus went into quarters, our real work began, — that of "framing" the new act for the next season.

All this happened several years after my first efforts at training, and Kas and Mo had become creatures of fair bulk, standing about six feet high and weighing more than a ton apiece. Long before,

THE "BIG BULL ACT" IN PROCESS OF REHEARSAL

my interest in working the twins had ceased, my every effort being needed with the bigger elephants, and Fred had obtained the services of another woman to appear in an act with Kas and Mo, the real work being carried on by a menagerie assistant, while my husband himself "broke" the act and made it ready for the road.

At the usual "working out" hour one morning, Fred, as was customary, took the twins into the yard for their ordinary routine. The elephants were sluggish, and seemed to be thinking of something else besides their lessons, with the result that they received exactly what any recalcitrant pupil receives at school, the announcement that they would be forced to "stay in after hours until they learned their rote." Noon came, and they went back into the menagerie house, believing that their day's work was over. Naturally, there was displeasure and plenty of it, when, toward the middle of the afternoon, Fred led them again forth to work.

Especially was this true with Kas. She did n't want to practise that afternoon, and announced the fact by loud bellowings, and with the intimation, through her actions, that she did n't intend to go any further with the rehearsal than was absolutely necessary.

This is the time, when, under ordinary conditions, one must force elephants on. Once let the

great beasts believe that they are the captain of their actions and the rule of the animal trainer is at an end. They'll be sluggish forever, and so Fred sent the protesting twins through their paces with more energy than usual. It fretted Kas, and with squeals and grunts and trumpetings she announced her resentment. Then the near-tragedy came.

Fred had sent her into a "hind leg stand", and Kas had obeyed, raising herself on her hind legs, trumpeting the while. Fred, in rehearsal of the assistant's part of the act, took his position before her, and facing her, close to the animal's breast and practically between her extended front legs. In an instant, it happened!

Those of you who believe that an elephant is slow in action — rid yourself of the idea. The beast may appear lumbering; it may seem clumsy and awkward. But let no one tell you that it is slow. Instead, the elephant is one of the swiftest-moving beasts of the animal kingdom. It can outrun any horse, it can move its trunk with a speed that makes it almost indiscernible, it can swing its tail, which seems so tiny, compared to its great bulk, with such force and rapidity as to knock unconscious any one who chances to be in the way. Before my husband could leap out of the path of danger, Kas had closed in on him and borne him to the ground, an infuriated thing with no other thought than the death of her victim.

She had used her forelegs even as a human being would use his arms, to draw the man to her, to jerk him from his balance, and then to crumple him under her, and by the time I reached the ring curb, she was kneeling over him, seeking to work him into a position where she could crush him with her tremendous weight, and in the meanwhile, mauling and squeezing him and seeking to end his life by vicious thrusts of her short, but sharp tusks. It was a battle between a man and an elephant, with suddenly developed murderous instinct on one side, and the keen brain of a resourceful man on the other.

Time and again, by swift turns of the head, Fred dodged those plunging tusks, while Kas endeavored to pull him under her and while every animal man I could summon by my frantic cries, strove to tear her away from her victim. Kas shook them off, one by one, nor did she even seem to notice the sharp prodding of the feeding forks, the shouts of command, the digging of the bull hooks as they caught her in the flanks in an effort to divert her attention from the man she was striving to kill.

A great effort and Fred writhed beneath her, twisting and doubling himself, at last to slide under one of her forelegs and free the upper part of his body. But only for an instant. Kas caught the motion and the intent. With a scream of rage,

she whirled, hovered for an instant above the man, then slid over on her side, pinioning Fred beneath her. Frantic, I stood there, powerless. I heard his ribs crackling beneath the weight of the great beast. His face went gray. Through his blue lips, a groan came — and then I ceased to be a woman. Blindly I rushed toward the beast, and as blindly I fought, raining blow after blow with my heavy bull hook against her forehead, and striving by every means at my command to divert the attack from Fred to me. In vain. Then came an inspiration.

With an effort to drive me off, Kas had curled her trunk, as though to kill me with one blow and put an end to my interference. I dodged, the blow only grazing my shoulder. She tried again — and this time I won. For in raising her trunk, she opened her mouth, and in that instant, I drove the bull hook as deep as I could into the tender membranes of her throat, twisted it there, and with my every atom of strength, jerked and tugged, until the give of the hook and the spurting of blood told of tearing flesh. A scream of pain came from the beast. An instant more and she was on her feet, forgetting the crushed trainer and with no other thought than to kill me. The race began.

Here and there about the winter quarters yard we went, the elephant bellowing and lunging for me, while I dodged her, even as a rabbit would

dodge a dog that had come too close on the scent. Now and then the swift-lashing trunk would nearly catch me, grazing my clothing, tearing it in the fierceness of the blow. Twice I escaped her only by doubling swiftly and dodging straight under her body, while she screamed and trumpeted and kicked wildly in her efforts to reach me. But now I was not afraid.

In the ring, two workmen were picking up my unconscious husband, that they might carry him to safety. In the animal house, I could hear the shouts of the men as they loosed the chains of the rest of the elephant herd and started them forth into the yard, faithful Old Mom, and Trilby and Floto and Frieda and Snyder. An instant more and out they came, the keepers trotting at their heads and edging them toward the recalcitrant Kas, who now paused as though in conjecture of the developments to come. That pause was enough. Before the beast could again resume her rampage, I had leaped to a position of safety behind the elephant reinforcements, while Kas was surrounded rapidly by the older and saner members of the herd, who held their circle immobile against her plunges and attacks, once she realized her imprisonment. There I left her to regain her composure under the command of the cooler heads of her own kind, while I hurried into the animal house and to my injured husband.

Kas had almost accomplished her object. Crushed, bloody, Fred lay on a bit of canvas, gasping for breath, an arm broken, four ribs fractured, the splintered ends cutting dangerously near the heart, and a mass of bruises from head to foot. Tenderly we placed him in a hastily summoned ambulance, while I, beside him, found the first real, horrible fear of my life. It came to me through the haze of all the excitement that, after all, Fred may have lost his fight. He was unconscious again.

All that night I sat with him in the hospital, and for forty-eight hours more before my eyes closed. And then only because a doctor had smiled and said that my husband was out of danger.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It naturally would be supposed that such accidents as this would impress more forcibly upon us the need of a home to which we could retire when the really big accident should occur, ending our days with the circus forever. It is a strange fact, however, that as time went on there was less and less connection between the two. They were entirely separate ambitions, each with a different interest and plan and ambition. We were to succeed to the fullest extent as animal trainers, then we would succeed at what was to follow. Certainly if ever there was a logical time at which to retire it was now. But weeks later, when the circus again took to the road for the new season and when the first parade wound its way through the streets of Albuquerque, a bandaged, pale-featured man bobbed at the end of the elephant line. Fred Alispaw was back on the job again, weak and suffering, but there just the same. Moreover, that afternoon, the first day in fact that he had been able to move about at all, he went into the ring in an elephant act. The beasts that he put through their paces were Kas and Mo! Such must be the life of an animal trainer.

For one never knows how the accidents may come, or when. It simply must be taken for granted that the work will entail injuries or perhaps death — and the life accepted in a fatalistic vein. At the time when things seem happiest, the blow may fall. There's little use in worry! One day, for instance, I was in the ring, with my elephants working perfectly. I had reached the place where Trilby did her "sit up", balanced on her haunches and holding up her front feet, while I mounted her head and stood upright.

Just as I took this position, two men entered the tent, followed by their respective dogs, which were not such good friends as their masters. Directly in front of the ring the canines decided to fight it out. Trilby, naturally nervous, jerked suddenly about to see what had happened, while I, perched atop her head, realized that if she went to her forefeet, there would be no possibility of saving myself from being crushed beneath her. There was only one thing to do. I jumped, landing heavily on the uneven ground, with the result that my left hip, in some unexplained manner, received a dislocation. I managed to walk out of the tent — but that was all. Weeks of treatment in the care of an orthopedic physician and as many weeks in a plaster cast resulted. When spring came again, I once more was doing my perilous balance on an elephant's forehead, although the effects of that

injury were permanent ones, requiring a heavy leather surgeon's harness even to this day.

But then, I suppose, one injury more or less does n't make much difference under the white tops. Besides, the rush of circus life is such that one forgets easily. Each twenty-four hours always brings something new, and one day, toward the end of a season, brought me the thrill of a new possibility in my life as a trainer. The owner had come on the show and halted me on the way to the dressing tent.

"Zora," he announced, "you're going to have two jobs next season."

"Which are?" I queried.

"Elephants and cats. I've bought a bunch of leopards and lions and tigers for you."

"Where are they?" It was a new interest to me, and it bred enthusiasm. I had conquered elephants, now I was to have lions and tigers and leopards! The show owner went on:

"Out in Denver, at winter quarters. Did n't think I'd send them on the show, because we have n't got the cages here in the first place, and you could n't do anything with them while you're on the road. Because I want something as original with those cats as you're doing with the elephants. You know — a flashy act; the kind that makes the audience sit on the edge of the seats. Want to take a try at it?"

My answer was sufficient. The contract was signed and that night Fred and I lay awake many hours while the circus train rattled and jolted along on its journey to the next town, making our plans already for the new act. But when the show season ended and we reached Denver, we found nothing but gloom and disappointment. The animals were not what we had thought them at all!

The owner, in buying his cats without the assistance of Fred, had been imposed upon. He had purchased the entire outfit of a carnival company, a den of working lions, together with one of tigers and leopards, a small steel arena and the necessary properties which went with the act, an outfit which seemed to him to be perfectly satisfactory. However, through the many exhibits daily with the carnival, the beasts had become so tame as to be utterly worthless. Some of them were so old that they even had lost their teeth. Others were like so many house cats. There was no fire in them, no spirit. All they wanted to do was to lounge about and sleep — or merely to take their pedestals and go through their paces like so many tired dogs. Tears of disappointment came to my eyes.

"I can't do anything with those poor old worn-out beasts," I told Fred. "I'd have to actually beat them to get them to do anything worth while. Look here, how many young lions and tigers have we in the menagerie?"

"None that are broken — except those in the Ricardo act."

"I mean unbroken ones."

"Oh." Fred looked at me for a moment, then smiled. "Enough, I guess. Three lions and three tigers. All unbroken, all young, all full of pep and all anxious to take a bite at some fresh woman trainer. But of course," and he shrugged his shoulders, "if you've made up your mind — "

"I have, Fred."

That ended the argument. Fred did n't say much that day, and the next I noticed that he had caused the feeding forks to be sharpened — the instruments by which the animal attendants, from outside the arena, fend off the attacks of a beast that is trying to kill its trainer. For I was starting in the cat-training business at a point where most persons leave off. Tigers and lions are natural enemies! It is hard enough to put working cats of opposite natures into the same arena — much more, unbroken ones!

However, I had made up my mind to one thing. Mr. Tammen wanted a real act. He could n't get it if I used the animals which he had purchased for me. He might not get it for another entire season if I were forced to go forth into the market and search for a "mixed group" that had been broken to work together. Therefore, the only thing to do was to make up a group of my own,

and train the beasts to do exactly what I wanted them to without the interference of other routine that might be sticking in their memory. It was to be a hard job, and a dangerous one, I knew. But I was willing to tackle it. That afternoon the work began.

"I'll take the tigers first," I told Fred, as the arena was erected and I went within. He grinned.

"And I'll take the precaution of having every animal man in this menagerie around this arena too," he answered. Then he whirled, and with his usual sharp manner of command, gave the order to hook up the animal chute which led from the arena to the tiger dens. While within, locked in a steel prison not more than twelve feet in diameter, with only a kitchen chair, a whip and a thirty-two revolver loaded with blank cartridges, I prepared to receive a visit from three tigers which never before had been within striking distance of a human being! I thought at the time that it was the greatest test to which the courage of a woman could be submitted. Looking back upon it now, from the vista of true experience, I find that this moment when I awaited the possible onslaught of physical oblivion was no more than a mere bagatelle. There are things far harder to face than death.

One by one, excited, nervous, the Bengals came into the arena, a place as strange to them as the

outside world to a person who never has known anything except a cloister. They suddenly had been taken out of their element and forced into a space that to them was boundless. They were lost, frightened, fearful of every movement which I might make. For to them I was some strange sort of monster which might at any moment end their lives, and not some one in fear of them!

They hissed and crouched and paced before me — standing silent and motionless before them! From far back in my memory came the advice of an animal trainer in the early days of my circus experience:

"Remember, the greatest secret of animal training is not to conquer your own fear, but that of the beast you're training."

And here I saw the truth of it. I was in danger, deadly danger, not because these beasts hated me, not because they wanted to kill me for the mere sake of killing, but because they were afraid of me and feared that if they did not kill me, I might kill them!

More and more rapid became their pacing. Louder their growls sounded and more ominous. The necessity for action came now, for while one of the great cats held my attention from across the arena, the other two, one on each side, strove to sneak behind me, as though to attack me from the rear. From outside the arena came the call of my

husband, and I felt that there was a slight note of fright in it:

"Watch 'em there, Honey! Watch 'em!"

I did not answer. I was too intent on the task before me; I was about to give my first command, and make the attempt to teach these slinking, hissing beasts the first lesson which any trained animal must know — to go to its individual seat and to remain there until the trainer calls it forth.

Keeping two of the cats well away from me, I started to crowd the third, touching him gently with the whip, and at the same time repeating the word "seat" — but it did not have the desired effect. The animal only became more frightened. It whirled. It hissed; then with a lunge, it strove to pass me, clawing at me with one paw as it went. A talon caught in my practise suit, swinging the beast about and frightening it more than ever. Then, almost before I realized it, the great cat had whirled and was coming straight at me, the red jaws wide open!

There was only one thing to do! Up came the revolver and I pulled the trigger, sending the charge of powder and paper wadding straight into the animal's mouth. With that, pandemonium!

The beast whirled, clawed at his face for an instant, then seemed to leap in twenty directions at once, while I, my whip cracking with all the strength that I could assemble, leaped here and

there, striving to keep the crazed animals on the ground. In vain. They tumbled over each other, they clawed and fought among themselves, and crawled up the steel bars, even to the netting which covered the big cage. They were wild — as wild as any murderous maniacs that ever existed!

A dozen feeding forks came through the bars from without, where sweating animal men worked to fend the beasts from me. Time after time they lunged and tore, while I dodged and retreated, held them off with the gun or the whip, or broke their leaps by throwing the kitchen chair straight at their breasts as they came upon me, thus entangling them and tripping them. For nearly two hours it continued, with Death at my elbow every instant.

CHAPTER EIGHT

How I survived those two hours, I have no way of telling. When it all was over, my practise suit was in shreds, while in fully a dozen places on my body were the marks of tiger claws, some of them no greater in extent than the scratch of a house cat, others, however, which went deep into the muscles. My clothing was spotted with blood. If ever a person was dishevelled, I was that one. But gradually I won my battle.

First one tiger quieted and contented himself with merely running about the arena. Then a second, and finally a third. Realization, in a dim fashion, at least, had come to them that I was there neither to injure them nor to be injured myself, that I would only fight when molested; and evidently a truce was all they cared for. It was enough of a victory for one day. Back to their dens they went for a rest of twenty-four hours — and I'll admit that I did some resting myself!

The next day brought less of a contest, and momentary occupation of their seats by the three beasts. On the third day, I accomplished my object, that of convincing them that as long as they occupied their individual pedestals, they would not be molested. And now I was ready for the

second struggle — that of training the three lions to do the same thing.

This was easier, for two reasons. The first was that I had learned a great many things about handling frightened beasts. The second was the fact that lions are easier, fundamentally, to train than tigers. There seems to be more knowledge on their part of what is expected of them, and less ferocity. Two days and my job was finished. Then came the hardest task of all — the mixing of lions and tigers in the same arena!

I knew that this meant a terrific battle was to come — and I slept but little the night before it happened. Training time arrived. I ordered the tigers into the arena first and sent them to their seats. Then, with a sense of misgiving, I'll admit, I gave the command to open the chutes for the lions.

The moment they left their cages, they scented their enemies. They did not slink into the arena — they sprang! In an instant, a tiger had left his seat, to leap from his vantage point, upon an approaching lion, and with swift-working claws and teeth sought to penetrate the greasy mane which forms the Nubian's chief protection.

But the lion was in fighting mood also, launching a terrific side-blow with one paw which sent his assailant reeling half across the arena, where dazedly it glimpsed me, and forgetting for a

moment that I was not an enemy also, sprang deliberately at my throat. Again the revolver flared, catching the beast in the mouth and causing him to twist in the air, while the grazing impact of his body hurled me against the bars, where I leaned for an instant breathless. No sooner had I straightened, than another fight began between natural enemies of the jungles, while I, realizing that my job was now more that of a peacemaker than a trainer, ran to the bars, seized a feeding fork and then, approaching the snarling animals as close as possible, fended them apart even as a person would separate two fighting dogs!

Time after time this happened, the revolver being called into play when the action became too rough, with the final result that the quick spat of the shots — and an animal detests nothing more — finally brought the attention of the animals to something other than fighting. And all for the simple reason that it diverted their attention, I shouted my commands and cracked my whip with all the force that was in me, bringing them to the realization that the woman who had asserted herself as a commander in the days that had passed was still in control. Cats have single-track minds. Once I succeeded in reminding them of the fact that I was there, the task was easier.

And when I speak of cracking my whip, in animal training, I mean just that, and not the striking of

the animal. There are a great many well-intentioned persons, who, at a circus performance, often sympathize unduly with the beasts of the training arena, believing that every blow of the whip strikes home. Instead — well, I'm afraid that I'm telling professional secrets, but no matter. Better that than to believe that every animal is beaten unmercifully. To tell the truth, days and weeks often go by without an animal being touched, and then only as reprimand. Children in old-fashioned schools get more whippings than the usual trained animal.

The whole system is that every cat is "trained to the whip." In other words, the cat is guided by the cracking of that whip, either over his body or on the ground, to do certain things. By light touches of the lash and then by terrific cracks of it just behind him, the unbroken animal is taught in his early training days to take his seat, or to move out in obedience to a command. The blow does n't touch him — or if it does, not with sufficient strength to cause pain. The same trick is used in all whip-cracking acts.

As to the animal which continually fights back, while the trainer seemingly beats him into submission — well, to be frank, he's trained that way. Circuses are in the business of giving audiences what they want. Therefore, lions and tigers are taught, deliberately almost, to attack their

trainer at every performance, only to desist when "beaten" into submission.

I once worked an "untamable lion" act in which, twice a day, rain or shine, I escaped from the lion's den just as the great beast sprang at me, his tremendous form crashing against the steel door of the arena as I closed it. One day I tripped and fell. Old Duke, the "untamable", fell over me. I don't know which of us was the more embarrassed. As swiftly as he could, he jumped up from his position across me, skirted the arena two or three times in wild fashion, then, with an inspiration, leaped back on his pedestal, for all the world like a big, abashed dog.

But the battle I had on my hands with this mixed group was an entirely different affair — for the present, at least. After an hour or so of incessant work, of leaping here and there, of firing relay after relay of revolver shots — Fred was passing me freshly loaded revolvers through the bars of the arena — I finally seated all the beasts, and the real beginning of my lessons had come. For now, I not only had the task of making these enemies become familiar with each other, but in addition, that of establishing cordial relations!

They were seated now, and so I seated myself in a kitchen chair, never moving except when they moved, never commanding them unless they strove to leave their seats. At intervals, I would send

one of them from the pedestal, allow him to walk across the arena and back again, then return him to his seat, to accustom him not only to this command, but to the knowledge that he could do this without fear of attack from his enemies. For two hours that day this sort of thing continued, and for two hours every day for three weeks afterward! It meant a nervous strain that sapped my strength even more than a good fight, for I did not know from one moment to the next what might happen; I must be on the alert every instant to check an encounter in its inception, or actually to jump between two quarreling beasts and fend them apart with a feeding fork.

After which I would invariably fly home and plunge into the thing which represented the farthest opposite to animal training of which I could think, — candy-making, or the concocting of some new dish, or else a desperate endeavor to memorize irregular French verbs — with the result that my sleep was a mixture of "*Je vaincs, tu vaincs, nous vainquons, vous vainquez, ils vainquent, il* seats, *vous* seats, *tu* Barney; get back there Hazel; *il vous* up Barney", and my dreams peopled with lions and tigers and troubles of training.

To this, of course, was added the inevitable reading of farm magazines and letters from those desirous to sell. Our plans had progressed but little in actuality, greatly in fervor and determination.

Now there was a sort of dogged atmosphere about it all; deep in my heart was a vague feeling that perhaps I did not want a farm, after all; nevertheless, I pursued the search with more persistence than ever. This in spite of the fact that my work with the new animals was so engrossing that unconsciously I had acquired one of the extremely necessary qualities of a successful trainer, that of becoming so absorbed in the task at hand that it is literally a part of one, sleeping or waking.

Slowly but consistently, day by day, each cat was taught to do some individual work. For instance, the big male lion was taught to roll a barrel across the length of the arena, turn around while standing on it, then roll it back again and go immediately to his seat. Nor was this easy. It was weeks before a lion could pass directly in front of a tiger without being attacked, or a tiger enter the proximity of a lion and a fight not ensue.

Just as with the elephants, I let the animals themselves suggest their own tricks. One tiger loved to climb and seemed to have an excellent sense of balance. Why not make use of it? Why not be the first woman to teach a tiger to walk a "tight rope?"

So the "rope" was made, not of hemp, but of wood, a long 2 x 4 of hard maple, to each side of which was fastened an edging of real rope, to make the illusion complete. This was fastened over-

head in the arena, while the ends, secure enough to prevent a fall were, at the same time, loose enough to be wobbly. The tiger which I selected took to her lesson with little coaxing. Soon I had trained her to make a spring from her seat, clutch a side of the steel arena and then spring to the "tight rope" where she weaved for a second, finally gained her balance, and then walked the length of it.

So, also, I taught my beasts the leaps — a combined "finish" in which all the animals plunge over hurdles — the tableaux, the teeter-tawter and a dozen or more tricks, all with comparative simplicity, once I had obtained my mastery. But that did n't mean that there were no exciting moments! Quite the contrary! One never knows what is going to happen on the inside of a training arena.

Just for instance: among the several menagerie dogs, useful principally as "mascots", was one which had become particularly attached to me and which awaited my arrival every morning at the animal barn. On this particular morning — it was nearing spring — the pup was asleep when I came to quarters and I was already in the arena when he awoke to discover my presence. He barked happily and approached the arena, not heeding my frantic commands for him to desist. Instead, he came straight to the bars and strove to crawl through!

In an instant, every cat was off the pedestals.

Before I could halt them, great claws had shredded the flesh of the unfortunate dog and dragged him through to the floor of the arena. There, crunching jaws crushed his bones, and with the taste of blood, the cats went mad. Here and there they fought, six tumbling, tossing enemies, the roars bellowing through the menagerie house, the fur flying, and I in the midst of it all, striving my best to separate them. It was not until a half hour later, when, my clothing torn from stray slashes of the great claws, my temper ruffled, and my revolver emptied of its blank cartridges, that I succeeded in restoring order. After that, we never allowed a dog within the menagerie house during training hours. It was too dangerous, not only for the animal itself, but for the woman who was inside the arena.

For let this be known, the circus must think of one thing above everything else, — the audience. The safety of those who come to a circus must be protected, and the trainer therefore is locked inside the arena by heavy straps which are wrapped and buckled about the steel door and the standards which hold them, so that in no event may there be a possibility of an animal escaping during the performance. Under such conditions, it is not a healthy thing to have animals about that may not only get themselves killed, but a performer also!

However, my act progressed well — so well that

ZORA AND THE MIXED GROUP, WHICH SHE ALONE BROKE FROM WILD BEASTS TO TRAINED ANIMALS

even I, anxious to have the best of all mixed groups, was satisfied. My climbing tiger still interested me. I had seen riding lions with other circuses, but not a riding tiger. Therefore, why not be the first woman to display a beast of this type?

Nor was it difficult. I knew that a tiger makes its kill by seizing its prey by the back of the neck and bringing death by an incision at the base of the brain. This was the part of my horse which I must protect. So a blindfolded horse was led into the arena, its head and neck protected by an armor of leather, studded with innumerable protrusions of sharp tacks, while upon its back was a square saddle, built something after the style of a miniature platform.

The tiger was placed on its high pedestal seat, under which the horse was passed at a gallop. Immediately the Bengal leaped, its great mouth spread wide, and its teeth seeking the kill-spot at the brain base. It met only armor and a mouthful of tacks. Angered, the beast leaped to the ground and made for me, only to be halted by my faithful kitchen chair and sent back to its pedestal. On the fifth attempt, the tiger made no effort to bite the beast, and merely rode around the arena on its back. In two days, the tiger and horse were on a truce basis, and working together perfectly. However, I never made the mistake of removing that armor. Tigers are too uncertain.

CHAPTER NINE

The true uncertainty of the Bengal tiger may best be gauged from an incident which gave Fred an opportunity to even certain scores; when Kas attacked him, I had saved his life. Now he saved mine!

I had been working my mixed tiger and lion act for some time, and on this particular day my tight-rope-walking tigress gave unmistakable symptoms of having a headache.

A headache, with a human, causes irritability and grouchiness, and it does the same with an animal. The tigress obeyed my commands — and stored her grudge.

One by one she went through the routine of her tricks, and at last raised herself to the tight-rope. There she turned, and as I believed, set her muscles to balance herself. Instead, from her vantage point above me, she leaped, while I, taken off my guard, was unable to evade her! An instant later I was borne to the ground, struggling against the weight of a four-hundred-pound assailant, while the burning of flesh told of the incision of swift-working claws at fully a dozen places on my body!

One of the poison-laden talons tore again and

again into my left arm, while another sank into my right hip. At the back of my head, I felt the crushing of heavy jaws which suddenly loosened. The thick folds of my uniform cape had acted as a life-saver; the tiger, making its usual kill-stroke, had encountered a soft protector of cloth which merely rolled up in its mouth, and, when the beast sought to tear the thing away with its claws, only entangled them and delayed it for the instant which meant for me a chance for life.

Fred was acting as my property man — none of the other animal attendants had the courage to go into that den of mixed beasts and attempt the work of moving about the heavy turntables and other rigging which was necessary to the performance. With the first lunge of the brute, Fred rushed forward, bringing forth his revolver as he did so and at the same time seizing a heavy training stick, pointed with a steel end. He fired twice — but evidently the tiger was beyond caring for powder and wadding. Then with one stroke, as the tiger reared back to manoeuver for a fresh hold, Fred jammed the fork down the angry beast's throat, and by main force threw her back on her haunches.

He now had the big cat where he could outplay her, and even before I could struggle to my feet, he had forced the beast back to her seat. For me the world was swimming; my wounds were burning and bleeding profusely, the blood, however,

being absorbed by the heavy velvet breeches and coat of my toreador costume. But even through the pain, through the haziness of it all, there was something which shot through my pain like a flash. That audience! It must not know! And so I whirled and swung wide my arms, forcing a laugh as I called through the steel bars of the arena:

"Not hurt! Not hurt a bit! She did n't even touch me!"

Applause drowned the words which came next — as Fred questioned hurriedly:

"Did she get you — did she get you, Honey?"

"Yes — pretty bad. But I can finish the act."

Then, reeling at times, mechanical in my actions, I went through the rest of the performance, to bow my way out of the arena and the tent, then to collapse in Fred's emergency shelter in the menagerie top while my husband worked feverishly to cauterize my wounds and prevent infection from the poisonous claws of the tiger.

Soon I became conscious again, with the knowledge that my work of the day had only begun. I was weak from loss of blood and from pain. But there was only one thing to do — go on, and finish my work. My heavy uniform had absorbed the blood; its dark color prevented the seepage being seen. Hastily Fred packed my clothing with antiseptic-soaked bandages. Ten minutes later, Fred led me to the big-top connection where, with

FRED ALISPAW WHEN HE WAS MENAGERIE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE SELLS-FLOTO CIRCUS, HOLDING SCOTTY, THE SCOTCH TERRIER, AND THE LION SHE ADOPTED

some sort of suddenly endowed power, I leaped to my old place at the head of the elephant line and trotted into the ring, there to go through every number of the elephant act — even to the ride out of the tent on the tusks of Old Snyder.

That night the work was even harder, for I was sorer and stiffer now. But an old adage of the circus world kept pounding in my brain: "The show must go on, the show must go on!" Besides, there was that tiger. I knew that if ever I showed my mastery over her it must be now, and so into the training den I went and through the act, following this by the performance of the regular elephant act, after which I collapsed once more when again I had reached the sanctuary of the emergency tent. But no one knew anything about that save Fred, and he did n't tell. It's a point of honor around the circus to keep your troubles to yourself. It was three days before even the women in the dressing tent noticed my bandages, whereupon I admitted that "I'd been scratched up a bit."

Scratches! Rather peculiar ones, however. So peculiar, in fact, that it was three weeks before I could take the bandages off the slightest of them! As for the wound in the hip, that was nearly two months in healing. But I'd wanted to be an animal trainer. I'd known beforehand that it was a dangerous calling. So why worry — if you get what you expect?

Indeed, accidents are looked upon rather lightly in the circus world. As long as the performer can keep life flickering and maintain the strength to go through the next act — that's about all that is necessary. I, myself, for instance, have experienced countless escapes from wrecks and blowdowns and animal break-aways, and of the latter, there is one I do not like to remember.

It was a tiger. The performance was in progress. A careless helper left open a den door, and out into a world which frightened it, amazed it, came a creeping, hissing Bengal. All it wanted was a place in which to hide. It was away from the only home it knew, that cage, and it felt that everything in this big, new universe into which it had stepped was its enemy.

A child sighted the beast from across the tent and became frenzied with fright. Before any of us could stop her, she had started toward her mother, on the other side of the big enclosure, and had run directly in front of the striped beast. One slashing sweep of a claw-studded foreleg. That was all. The child was dead. That sort of thing I do not care to think about. That child represented a power, the safety of which is sacred to the circus — the audience.

But the usual escape is of a lighter nature. Once, for instance, we were running into Lewiston, Idaho, and about daylight were descending a fair grade,

but at a slow rate of speed, indeed not more than fifteen miles an hour. For some unknown reason the engineer applied the emergency brakes, stopping the front end of the train almost instantly, while the rest of the cars came on at their same speed, owing to some defect in the working of the air brakes.

The coaches in the rear piled up, sending the "Ben Hur" car, in which Fred and I lived, completely off its trucks and up onto a flat car which carried several dens of wild animals. Like all wrecks, it happened in an instant. Everything was confusion — which became worse with the racking announcement from without:

"Mr. Alispaw — Mr. Alispaw! Quick! There's a lion loose!"

Out of the car we hurried, to find that the corner of a cage had been ripped off, and that the den formerly occupied by Bulldozer, a big, full-maned Black Nubian, was empty! Nor was he to be seen.

"Went over that way!" came a voice from high in the air, and we looked up to see a telephone pole clustered with human forms. And tense as the situation was, Fred and I could not help laughing.

On that pole were fully ten persons, women and men, who twice each day faced death in some form or another, as their part of the circus performance. One of them was a man who allowed his wife, blindfolded, to throw sharp axes at him,

making an outline of him in the receiving board which caught them, and none of which missed his body by more than half an inch. Others were members of casting acts — and there is nothing more dangerous. Still another was a cage cleaner who daily went into this very lion's den, but who would n't even meet it, now that it was out here in the open!

For a moment Fred and I stood and poked fun at them. Then we hurried to our work of capturing the animal. The first task was to find him.

This was accomplished in a few moments when a low, rumbling roar from a clump of bushes gave evidence of his presence. Fred turned quickly.

"Talk to him. Think he's all right — just scared."

All of which was a natural conclusion. An animal's cage means home to him, and he really does n't want to go anywhere else. The result is that when he gets out into the world, his only thought is to hide, or to seek food if he is hungry; and there is little danger of his deliberately seeking trouble.

So I went forward and called the animal's name, receiving a hiss in answer — one, however, which did not worry me. It held more of nervousness than anything else, I knew. I spoke again and moved closer. Soon I was sitting on a stump not five feet from the lion, which still crouched in

the shrubbery, talking to him, reassuring him, and telling him not to worry, that we'd have a cage fixed up for him in a minute and that he then could go back home. But did the human fruit of the telephone tree come to the ground? It did not — it stayed there until we had erected a canvas wall and shunted the distressed lion back behind bars!

In another "escape", which was in reality only a sortie from one side of a cage to another, I discovered that the emotions of a cat animal can even include gratitude! This was a puma named Pauline, and she shared a compartment cage with a jaguar, her natural enemy, safety being assured by a heavy partition which divided the cage. However, one day a careless animal man left the latch of this dividing wall unfastened, and in a moment the jaguar had forced his way through and to his prey.

With the first cry of the stricken beast, I seized a heavy iron cage scraper and bade the frightened cage man run for another bar. Together we separated the fighting beasts and after considerable effort crowded the seething jaguar into his own compartment and dropped the latch on the dividing door. The puma lay gasping on the floor, her body torn in a dozen places. A duty was before me, and although no human ever had entered the cage with this beast, I determined to go in.

But she made no effort to strike me or tear at me with her jaws. Instead, there came only a mild hiss, and she submitted to my ministrations as though she understood that I was in her cage to aid her and not to harm her. Twice each day for nearly a month I entered her cage that I might dress her wounds, and the time arrived when she would watch for my coming, as though the visit were a pleasant part of her life. One day as I worked, I felt something warm and moist — the puma, wild animal though she was, was licking the hand of the person who ministered to her. After that, it became a part of my menagerie life to go into the cage and pet the beast, stroking her as one would stroke a house cat. In all my experience, she was the most affectionate, the most grateful animal that I ever dealt with; when I would approach the cage she would leap back and forth in manifest joy, then roll upon her back and purr like the best behaved "tabby" in the world. And when wild animals actually give gratitude, instead of the hatred that they are supposed to show, is there any reason why one should not love them?

CHAPTER TEN

In such an environment as pictured in this recital of a few of my experiences, I lived for more than ten years. In that time, I saw my every ambition realized. My childhood dreams had come true. My parents had learned that the circus is not the terrible thing it is supposed to be, but a human sort of affair after all, where even the cursing roughnecks or laborers are gentlemen under the skin, ready to give up their lives if necessary for the protection of the women of the circus. I was more than happy. Then came the war, while Fred watched his men depart and chafed under the knowledge that his crushed ribs and injured knee — souvenirs of his battle with Kas — prevented. The urge that was in the heart of every true American was strong within us. We wanted to help, and we knew that we could not do this as long as we stayed with the circus.

Hoover was calling for food for the support of a nation and of the men flooding over seas. It crystallized our dreams of a farm and for a time we pursued the thought madly. We were determined now; the end had come, and we handed in our resignations to the little show owner who had been our friend through ten happy, spirited years of

trouping. He received them laughingly, and with a twinkle in his eye, said:

"Well, I'll take these things if it will make you any happier. But when the bluebirds sing again, you and Fred will be right there waiting for the band to play and the bugle to sound off for the parade. You know," he added philosophically, "you can't make anything else out of show folks, and you need n't try."

"That's just it," I said. "Of course I can't answer for Fred, but I have wondered sometimes if I am really 'show folks'."

"You?" he asked, and chuckled as he appraised me, "Why, Zora, if ever there was a woman who was every inch an actress and who loved it above everything else in the world, it's you. The applause of an audience is just food and drink for you, and you may think that you'll be able to get along without it, but you won't. When the springtime comes again, wild horses won't be able to pull you away from the white tops. You'll be right back there in the ring handling the elephants again and tickled to death to do it."

I laughed, but there was a certain intuitive knowledge that this was no laughing matter.

"I'll never travel with a circus again, Mr. Tammen," I said.

He looked up sharply.

"Why," came curtly.

"I don't know why," I answered, and it was a truthful reply, coming more from my subconscious brain than my conscious. Many years have passed since that interview. The dear little circus owner, after all only a big-hearted boy playing with his toys which formed to others the vast business enterprise of a tremendous tented organization, has for several years been in his grave. The show has traveled to other hands; the great cats which I worked in the arena have fulfilled their lifetime of exhibition, some to die in the frenzies of an attack upon a trainer, others to yield to the diseases particularly deadly to cage occupants, a few to loll about in their dens, aged and toothless, pensioners of the menagerie. Of the great elephant act of which I formed the mainspring, Snyder is dead with the taint of the renegade upon his name; Floto endures a like contumely, killed by a perfect volley of steel-jacketed bullets as he rushed forward upon a sheriff's posse at Orange, Texas, swinging in his trunk a death-dealing telegraph pole as easily as a strong man would wield a club. In the winter quarters at Peru, Indiana, Old Mom, once the leader of my herd, munches hay and peanuts with no more arduous duties than the supervising of a herd of baby elephants undergoing their first throes of training. All these things have happened and the years have passed, but neither Fred nor I have returned to the circus.

Now that the final step had been taken, events progressed rapidly toward a culmination. We had become half convinced that what we wanted lay in the Imperial Valley of California and since this obsession for land had been mainly manifested by me, although Fred had heartily concurred with the idea, he suggested that I go out there and look over the country, that I might be wholly satisfied when we made the final step. We felt that we were well equipped now to enter a farming venture. Heavy saving on the part of both of us, with the exception, of course, of the money I had spent on linen, had resulted in a nest egg of some twelve thousand dollars in cash, to say nothing of my diamonds. These glittering stones, by the way, are the circus man's bank. Traveling from town to town as performers do, with but little contact with any particular city or locality, savings and checking accounts are somewhat rare. Instead, the circus person buys diamonds, hoarding them year upon year, and figuring that the gradual increase in the worth of the precious stones will pay greater interest than any bank or trust company. We had gained our share of the white jewels; in fact, we had bought more of them than the average person, always with the idea that they would form a nest egg for a rainy day in case our first experiment with a farm were not successful. The other people of the circus had a name for these jewels of ours; they called them "Zora's Cows."

But my trip to the Imperial Valley was disappointing for the same reason that all other trips of inspection had proved a failure. The broad fields, for some reason, did not interest me. The pretty California homes were cheerful and alluring, yet some way I could not picture myself as living there nor could I explain this antipathy. But the revelation came on the way home. Crossing the bleak, homestead sections of wind-swept Wyoming, I awoke to the truth with a suddenness which chilled me for a moment with the starkness of what might lie before me. From the train window I saw the meager little houses, the makeshift fences, the lone, struggling beings working in the bare fields and it frightened me — because of the urge within me to do the same as they. But the fear soon passed in a wave of wild, almost maddened, enthusiasm. My eyes grew feverish as I talked it over with Fred after my return to Denver, and my enthusiasm heightened even as his lessened.

"Do you know what you're saying?" he asked. "It means you'll have to give up everything in the world, work like a man, and live as people lived fifty years ago. You could n't stand it, Zora."

"I can stand it," I replied madly, "and I will. Unless you refuse to go with me."

"I?" He laughed bitterly. "I'm not the one to be considered. I'm a man; I can stand those things. Besides, I come from a homestead family; I lived on one when I was a boy; I know what it

means, and I won't be disappointed when we face the real facts. But you are different; you have already pictured things in your imagination and all the explanation and argument in the world can't change your mind about what you believe homesteading to be." Suddenly he rose and began to pace the room, his brow furrowed, his hands clasped tightly behind his back. "Zora," he asked at last, "do you really want to do this thing?"

"Above everything else in the world," I answered. The desire had taken the form of a strange intoxication. I did not want to be told about the hardships I might be forced to face. I wanted to look upon homesteading only as a dream of roseate hue, the bitterness to be evaded as long as possible and faced only when I was forced to it. Fred regarded me quizzically.

"It won't do any good to argue, Zora," he said at last. "We have endured many things together under the big top. If your mind is set on this, I will play my part. When do you want to go and where?"

"There's a new country opening up over in northwestern Colorado," I answered. "I've got all the information on it; there was a special edition of the *Great Divide* published last week, giving all the details, and I bought one in Cheyenne. We can buy a relinquishment over there cheap;

some homesteader, you know, who has already partly improved his land and wants to quit."

Fred nodded. I found later that he too knew about the country.

"When do you want to go?" he asked again.

"Now; this very moment!" I laughed nervously at my own excitement. "You know what I mean, Fred," I explained. "Of course we can't pick up and go this instant. We'd have to take a week or ten days to buy the things we'll need. But oh, Fred," I exclaimed, "now that I've made up my mind, I feel that I can't wait. The days will simply drag until I get there!"

"And you want to go now," he asked in amazed tones. "Now; in the winter time?"

"The sooner the better!" I was crazed with desire.

Fred did not answer for a moment. Again he took to his pacing, mental turmoil written in his features. But at last he halted and his shoulders squared with that attitude of fighting determination which I so often had seen evinced when the elephant herd threatened stampede or during a crucial moment in the training den.

"All right, Zora," he said quietly; "we'll go."

It was therefore in December of 1917 when I sat in the stuffy, red-plushed coach of a rocking passenger train as it dragged its way upward, wearily upward, through the countless tunnels

and gas-filled snowsheds necessary to the crossing of the snow-bound Continental Divide. The journey had continued since early morning; it was late afternoon now, and I started anxiously as the brakeman entered and paused for a moment by my seat.

"They're on the siding at Rollinsville," he said, and I rose and hurried to the platform.

The train crawled on, then stopped, while I looked about eagerly. But there was only the station, grimy with soot-smudged snow, the blasts of white from the grim peaks of the mountains which shut in the little town, the huddled forms of the train crew, as, thickly clothed, they went about their duties, the smoke of the engine swept low against the ground by the shrieking gale, and the faint outline of a freight caboose on a siding far ahead.

The train started anew. Slowly it crawled onward; we passed the caboose and with dragging progress crept by the rest of the train. Then suddenly I leaned far from the platform and cried out, and a call answered me, a wave of the hand. In the open door of an "immigrant car" stood a man, hatless, the wind sweeping his shock of hair about his eyes, a curious cow gazing over his shoulder. Behind him was piled a heterogeneous mass of furniture, second-hand farm machinery, boxes and bales, while three dogs peered out from

about his legs. Again I called to him and waved and threw him a kiss, and he leaned from the freight-car door to wave to me until we had passed out of sight of each other. Then, smiling, inordinately happy, I went back to my place. That man was my husband. We were on our way to the fulfillment of what then seemed a roseate dream.

I sank into the ancient, red-plush seat again with the feeling of a conqueror. I picked up the Denver newspaper which I had brought with me, and with quite a feeling of pride, turned to a "feature story" which I already had read several times. It carried a picture of me, posed high in the air upon the tusks of Snyder, while above the photograph was a three-column headline, proclaiming:

ZORA, BRAVEST WOMAN IN WORLD,
BECOMES PRESENT-DAY PIONEER.
Famous lion, tiger and elephant trainer
known to millions of circus goers,
turns to simple life in
homestead country.

Then followed the story, continuing, after a resumé of my history:

Now the time has come; Fred and Zora Alispaw are realizing their dream. They have left the blare of the band, the shrieking of the calliope, the bluster and hurry and excitement of the circus tent, for a stilly life in what is practically frontier country, where they will pioneer upon a homestead

and build as our forefathers built. Mr. Alispaw of course, will be able to adapt himself; besides, he was raised upon a ranch and knows its hardships. This is not his idea; if anything he has tried to discountenance it. So, then, what of Zora? She who has talked of this adventure until the press agents referred to her diamonds as "Zora's Cows?" What is this woman going to do, with her education and her versatility in the languages, when there is only loneliness or the shrieking coyotes with which to converse? What is going to happen to her — Zora, accustomed to the applause of thousands upon thousands, to the interests of travel, the accommodations of civilization — when she goes to live in a log house? Of course, the life of a circus is a hard life, but it is one within constant reach of the every advantage which the big cities afford. There'll be none of this sort of thing in the country to which she is going; away from the railroad, from conveniences, from doctor or drugstore or grocery. And the question is: how long will the "Bravest Woman in the World" stand it?

I chuckled derisively. I knew what I was doing; I'd find a way to live and laugh! Was this not my dream?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Now that the final step had been taken, I could see only the bright side, caring little for anything else. After ten days of frenzied, last-minute preparation, our journey at last had begun on the way to what I shall call Roadstop, the outfitting place for a vast stretch of practically virgin territory in the northwestern part of Colorado, where there were no railroads, where the same conditions existed as forty and fifty years ago, and where a frontier practically offered itself to be conquered by a newer generation of pioneers. Always romantic, I fringed the adventure with a golden edge; I pictured a beautiful ranch house in the near future, great herds of cattle; luxuries.

The land would cost us little, leaving practically all of our entire savings of $12,000 for improvements. And so Fred dragged along in the "immigrant car" — as freight cars designated for the handling of settlers are called — with our farm implements, the milch cow we had purchased in Denver, our furniture and three of the circus dogs which had attached themselves to us: "Scotty", a tiny Skye terrier which had made herself famous by actually nursing and rearing an orphaned lion

cub, "Puppy", an elephant dog, and "Nosey" a nondescript which had nosed her way into the circus and into our hearts, while I dreamed away the miles over the Continental Divide, down the other side, through seemingly impenetrable canyons and at last, the next day, into Roadstop, the end of the railroad, there to wait until the slower progress of the freight train at last should bring Fred to join me.

A flat little place, fringed by cottonwoods, with trails leading into it from seemingly every direction — such was Roadstop. There was no snow here, but beyond the outlying valleys, the foothills and mountains, which at their distance seemed to form a tremendous rim about the lower country, rose in dazzling whiteness; beautiful at this distance, alluring.

I roamed about the little town in a state of ecstasy. This sort of place was new to me; I gazed frankly at the cowboys, with their big hats and tight-legged overalls; they were different indeed from the overdressed, showy cowboys of our circus concerts. I stared too at the grizzled freighters, the "brushers", as a train acquaintance informed me they were called, or persons who had taken up claims in the sagebrush country, there to grub the earth free of growths and gradually build it into productive areas; men who were unmistakably cattlemen gathered in small groups on the corners

and I learned after a time that it was a day of big excitement; there was to be an auction for the benefit of the Red Cross, and the countryside had come into town to attend it.

But there seemed something strange; at last I realized that it was the deficiency of women; there were indeed few who could not be identified easily as residents of the town itself. In the eyes of the visitors, I thought I detected an expression as of gauntness, of weariness, as if some tremendous burden were constantly becoming heavier, more crushing upon shoulders unable to bear the strain. It was only a momentary thought; soon it was gone in the excitement of watching the assembling of the various knots of people and the thrill of standing, like a spectator at a parade, and viewing the passage of a herd of bawling, white-faced cattle on their way to the stock pens. Some day Fred and I would have such herds as this, when our ship came in. At last I moved onward to the auction, finally taking a part in it myself and coming away the owner of a sack of potatoes, a crate of hens and another membership in the Red Cross, this time, of course, in the local organization. Then, after a long night had passed, I sought the freight yards, finally to thrill as I never thought possible, at the sight of smoke in the distance. At last I cried out and waved frantically, and Fred waved in return, pointing upward to a ragged

piece of cloth he had nailed above the door of the freight car, and upon which was scrawled:

"Alispaw's Famous Home-Bound Show."

It was with that spirit of fun and enthusiasm that the caravan was unloaded; the dogs leaped and barked with joyous freedom after having been penned up for three days; Fred and I were feverish until we could store everything at a "Feed Corral and Bunk-house" as the sign read, otherwise a sort of combined livery stable and storehouse. Then together, excited, burning with the land fever — and once it gains a grasp upon a person it is like a consuming disease — we sought out one of the rather numerous real-estate offices which had sprung up with the opening of this country to general settlement. We told our needs — and I'm afraid that I did most of the talking: something picturesque; in the mountains rather than upon the desert-like stretches of sagebrush. Something with good grazing land where we could raise cattle, where there would be water for irrigation, and timber, of course, for protection: Fred and I had studied cattle raising from all its aspects — on paper. The glib agent rubbed his hands and smiled.

"Got just what you want," he announced. "Just thirty-odd miles out. On Burnt Mountain, fine timber, great grass, best grazing proposition in the whole section."

"A homestead?" we asked.

"Better than that," he told us. "A relinquishment. Understand? Fellow took up a place out there, bought machinery, built a cabin, and did a lot of improving. Then got tired of his job and now wants to sell out. All you have to do is to make a new filing on the land, get the advantage of the time he's spent on it, and move right in. Got the right to a filing on an additional acreage adjoining — and there you are."

The price? It was only $600 for everything — for the man's half interest in the machinery which he had bought in partnership with a neighbor who lived some miles away, for the relinquishment, and for the cabin. We gasped with the cheapness of it. The agent hurried to clinch the deal.

"Take you right out," he announced. "It's just a little jog."

The start was made, first in an automobile in which we proceeded for a few miles, until blocked by ruts and mud and snow, and then in a "spring rig" which the agent procured at a ranch house. Gradually the country became rougher; the flat stretches of sagebrush gave way to serrated ridges as we neared the mountains; finally we faced what seemed to be a tremendous man-made wall of medieval design, with battlements and loopholes and sentry posts — like the barricades of an ancient castle, extending without an opening. But the

opening was there, nevertheless, a break at a rounded point, and we went through, to find ourselves winding along at the very edge of the foothills, while the agent, with a careless wave of the hand, denoted a tremendous mountain far to the right.

"Burnt Mountain," he announced. "Finest grazing property in this whole district."

I grew enthusiastic over the colorations, the pink-white of the great fields of snow, the tremendous juttings of the rocks, the blackness of the pines, but Fred said nothing. And I realized that he had hardly spoken a word during the entire trip from Roadstop, merely sitting there, hands folded, shoulders hunched, a slight crease between his eyes.

"Don't you like it?" I asked suddenly. He smiled.

"I'm not thinking about myself," came quietly.

"Well, don't worry about me. I think it's simply beautiful. And the quiet, Fred! After our years on the road."

"That's just what I was thinking about," he answered slowly. "The quiet."

Here our conversation was interrupted by a stop at a deserted cabin. For nearly a mile the horses had been floundering in deep snow, and the spring rig had several times slued dangerously. Now the agent alighted, and nodding his head toward a

bobsled which lay at the side of the little log shack, indicated another change of conveyance.

"Snow's a little heavy this year," he lied easily.

Fred helped with the change of hitching, while I sat by, enthusiastic over the adventure. If the folks on the show could see this — Fred and I going to look at a future home and taking every possible form of conveyance to do it! The spell of romance was upon me; this was pioneering! I was aglow with the stern beauties before me, the rise and sweep of the mountains with their coronas of white, and with their filmy streamers floating away like misty clouds where the incessant winds of the high countries were swirling the loose snow from the tops of hundred-foot drifts in a ceaseless blizzard.

It was a country of the sort I had never seen, except for a fleeting glimpse from a car window as the show trains in bygone days had crawled over some mountain pass or skirted the snowy ranges. Then it had been only a swift panorama; here everything was under the closeness of microscopic inspection. I forgot all except my interest in the country, the strangeness, the mysticism, the stilly lure of it. Upward we went over the dimly marked trail, while the vegetation changed from the gaunt, upstretched arms of giant sagebrush to the low-hovering clumps of scrub oak, almost buried in

snow, which in turn gave way to great clusters of service and buck brush and this in turn to the ghostly white of grove after grove of quaking asp—

"Quakers, they call 'em here," said the agent and clucked to his horses, while I gazed ahead to the steep slopes above, with their dark patches of balsams and spruce and willow pine, and above that a tremendous expanse where all was devastation, except for the criss-crossing of down timber, and gaunt sentinels of what once were majestic trees, remainder of an ancient forest fire. The agent noted my glance. "Burnt Mountain," he said. "That stretch of down timber's just above your place." As suddenly he turned his head to the sun, low against the ragged edge of the Wasatch Range, ninety miles away. "Guess we'd better jog along. There's a cabin up here."

Even as he said it, the sun disappeared. It did not redden as the suns of the lowlands do at sunset; it merely flared for an instant in a glorious dissemination of coloring and then it was gone. Almost immediately this whole, high world began to take on a bluish tinge; the snow seemed to darken; the brown leaves of the scrub oak, still clinging to the trees, became black; Fred leaned toward the agent.

"Will we make it by dark?" he said.

"No, but there's a cabin up here a way. We'll get there."

This while I sat entranced with the closing in of night. It seemed to come upon us like the lowering of a cloud, which sifted down upon us darker — darker; then the world was black, with the crisp stars literally popping out along the faint outline of Burnt Mountain. The sled stopped. We were at a cabin, concealed until now by a turn of the trail, and almost before I realized it, the men were on the ground, unhitching the horses, their forms vague, their voices coming as from far away. At last they called to me and we entered the cabin by its unlocked door, to look, by the aid of a match, upon a cheerless interior of chinked logs, furnished sparely with but little more than a tiny, square, two-hole stove, a box which had been converted into a table, two staple kegs which evidently served for chairs, a few rusty tin utensils, a battered skillet and a coffeepot without a lid. For just a moment, I stood hesitant — as though some one were touching me upon the shoulder and urging me to go away — to return, to forget this dream which had obsessed me; it was as though a future life were being lived for me that I might see it. As suddenly, however, the spirit of adventure which first had sent me into the steel arena to the training of lions and tigers and leopards who never before had obeyed a woman, was upon me anew. So this was a frontier cabin! Deserted! And we were to spend the night there!

"This is going to be fun!" I laughed. "Provided, of course, we've something to eat!"

Fred by this time had found a lantern — and food, such as it was; ancient bacon, canned milk, flour and something which passed as coffee. The agent, accustomed to such emergencies in the interest of his clients, already was building a fire in the tiny stove and explaining that this was the cabin of a homesteader who had gone away for a few days.

"Since you're going to be out here," he said, "you might as well know the rule in this country. Always leave your door unlocked when you go away. Somebody might come along and need to get in — like we did. We're going to be a bit put out to-night on account of there not being any beds — "

"No beds?"

"Nope. Most homesteaders batch it," he said at last. "Fellows like this one as a rule don't have beds. They sleep in bedding rolls — a tarpaulin fixed like a sack, with the blankets inside, so it can be rolled up and roped to go behind a saddle. You'll probably have some of them for going out on round-up after you've started your cattle proposition. As for to-night here," he glanced about him, "the place is pretty well chinked, and I guess we can find some oat hay in the lean-to."

I had noticed that Fred had watched me closely when the agent had talked about persons who

might be forced to drop in — and I wondered why. The situation did not visualize to me; besides, I was busy with coffee and frying pan; soon, by lantern light, we were gathered about the box table, devouring the bacon and coffee and a "dough-gob" or bread baked in a mass from biscuit dough — a concoction of Fred's. Then the men put the horses in the lean-to shelter of slab-wood, and brought in enough oat hay for three small "shake-downs." We slept in our clothing, naturally, while the men took turns during the night in replenishing the fire in the little stove. Then at dawn we were up, to a scanty breakfast and to the re-hitching of the sleigh.

"Well?" asked Fred, as we stood together in the doorway, awaiting the agent who had gone for the horses. "What do you think of it now?"

I did not answer him for a moment, in the thrill of watching the sun rise upon Burnt Mountain, the creeping progress of faint yellow, as it touched the top of the peak, turning the snow to a beautiful creaminess, then slowly crept downward, at last to strike the area of burnt land. It entranced me.

"Fred!" I exclaimed. "If you're willing, we're going to live on Burnt Mountain!"

I never shall forget the peculiar, searching look he gave me.

"Do you mean it, Zora?" he asked.

"Of course!"

"And last night — in that cabin. That did n't frighten you?"

"Why should it, Fred?"

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know," came his answer at last. "But I've just wondered so much — what you'd do after we got out here. You know, a woman's different from a man."

"But we're not going to spend our lives sleeping on floors."

"I know, but there are other things. Still, if you've got your heart set on it — "

He went then to aid the agent. Soon we were again on our way, gliding over the snow, upward, steadily upward, as if we intended to scale the very majesty of the snow-crusted peak itself, then suddenly dipping and dropping down into a sheltered pocket in the hills which opened into an area of perhaps five acres, surrounded by tremendous quakers, some of which reached more than two feet in diameter. A pocket surrounded by mountains, a great dome to the northwest, which the agent called Quaker Knob, a peak to the north, twin peaks to the east, and within the very boundary lines of the relinquishment a tremendous crest which rose sheer, and whose summit was bare where the wind swept it ceaselessly, no matter from which direction it blew; this was our destination. Nor was I to know that there would come

the day when Fred and I would christen that bare crest Mount Osa, because it was our oasis — a place where we could at least see the earth, when all about us was snow! Such thoughts were far from my mind now, and from Fred's, for my enthusiasm had overcome his fears. This was the ideal place; away from the world's bustle and excitement. The spot we had longed for when, at the end of a dragging season, with its thousands upon thousands of miles of railroad travel, with its blare and bluster and turmoil, we had wished time and again to be a "million miles from nowhere." The cabin, a rude erection of quaker logs, with a dirt roof and dirt floor, was to us both only a foundation upon which we would build a real home. There was no need to examine the soil; we knew it was rich from the surrounding growths, especially of the quakers. A thousand things that should have come into our minds became hazy and indistinct. Cautions which we had carefully thought out in advance were forgotten. We had been mad for years with the land fever. The delirium of ownership was upon us now. The rest is a haze; late that night in the real-estate office in Roadstop, we signed a contract which agreed to give us a "true and valid homestead relinquishment at a later date", and the former claimant's interest in the farm machinery owned with a neighbor. Whereupon we paid six hundred

dollars; then arranged with feverish anxiety for the start. Fred engaged a man and his boy, with two wagons, each of which was drawn by four horses. At last, with our effects loaded, including the potatoes and the crate of poultry from the Red Cross sale, and the cow trailing after the second load, Fred took his position on the first wagon, while I, with Scotty in my arms, crawled beside the boy on the second vehicle, and with barking of dogs, the creaking and straining of the loads and the flourish of rawhide tied to a long stick, our start was made, — to Burnt Mountain and the building of our home in the wilderness.

CHAPTER TWELVE

They were frankly curious about us, that man and the boy. At last they confided to us that it was unusual for folks to homestead in the winter time, and especially away up there in the mountains.

"Th' snaw lasts pritty lawng," the boy said.

I explained it — that we had just finished our season with the circus and that it had seemed useless to wait until summer. The boy swung his rawhide.

"Guess 't would n't make no difference nohow," he said at last, "if you ain't afraid o' lions 'n' tigers."

It gave me a slight inkling of the foolish thing which we were doing — but only for that moment. True, I knew we would suffer some inconveniences until we were settled, but that was catalogued also as an adventure, and as "camping out", nothing more. It gave a zest to the thing. More, if my adventure seems preposterous, let me say that it was only an example of land madness experienced in even greater degrees by many others who came into this country during those rush years and who suffered even more than I. For some of those — died!

But at the moment, I really thought nothing of the possibility of suffering or of privation. A person reared to conveniences cannot really visualize anything else. One sees a thing in its stark reality, only to change it mentally to one's own ideas — "as soon as they get things fixed up." Until such time, of course, that the full realization comes that the conveniences which have always been so accessible are not magic things after all, ready to appear upon one's mere desire for them.

So it was with every confidence that we made our start, moving by easy stages, as the road was frozen and rough, finally stopping for luncheon and to rest the teams. Then the start again, jolting and weaving, until at last, along toward mid-afternoon, I realized that I had become extremely weary and stiff from striving to hold my position on top of the jolting load. At last a man with a light conveyance overtook us and I begged a ride, which lasted five miles or more, far enough to carry me hopelessly out of sight of the slow-moving teams in the rear. The three dogs had come with me and at last, once my "lift" had turned away upon a side road, in response to their begging, I began to walk, finally reaching the place where, I remembered, we turned from the main road upon the trail to Burnt Mountain. I looked for the teams. After an hour of waiting, they were still out of sight, and I pushed on — walking rapidly

now, with a sudden, incomprehensible fear clutching me. The sun had reached the edge of the hills in the west. I knew that in a few minutes more it would drop like a plummet, and that it would be night.

Hurriedly now—somewhat frantically—I moved upward along the trail, holding the dogs close to me for company, and searching in my memory for the location of a tiny cabin which I had noticed upon the previous trip. At last I saw it through the swift-falling dusk, and moving toward it as quickly as possible, knocked for admittance. My summons was answered by a slight opening of the door, through which peered a worn-looking little woman, behind whose skirts hid two frightened children.

"Well," she asked in a frightened, high-pitched voice, "what do you want?"

"I am lost," I explained, then told her who I was and how the situation had arisen. "May I stay here to-night?"

The door started to close, finally to halt at a tiny crack.

"I don't know," came finally, "I'll have to ask my husband."

She called then, and closed the door, while from the corral, a hundred feet or so from the house came an answering voice, followed after an interminable time by the husband carrying the night's

scanty milking in a battered lard bucket. Again I told my story, while the man looked at me with frank suspicion. At last, however, he nodded.

"I guess we can keep you," he said, "if you can sleep on the floor."

"Oh, I can do that," I answered eagerly. "It's just shelter I want."

But even as I said it, I rebelled. That night in the homesteader's cabin had been spent in a spirit of excitement and fun; this was something different. I had the feeling of an outcast; a woman on foot, with three dogs whining beside her, begging at the door of a stranger for shelter.

Not that I was ungrateful; I was heartily so. But a sense of proportions had begun to enter my mind. Could it be possible that this sort of thing would continue — this sleeping on floors, this begging at doors for hospitality? I ate with but spare appetite when they set their meager store of food before me; a fact made up for by the ravenous appetite of the dogs. Then, staggering with fatigue from my long walk through deep snow, and with the enervation of altitude, I waited until the man had scattered a forkful of hay upon the floor and spread a comforter upon it for my bed, then dropped upon the "shakedown."

But not for sleep. In the one other room, I could hear the snoring of the husband — such breathing as can only come to one mentally and physically

exhausted. The woman tossed and groaned in her sleep; exhaustion was there too, the exhaustion, I knew, of two people fighting for life. It sent cold fears chilling through me. Must this be the life of every one in this country? The thought went through my brain in constantly recurrent flashes, coupled with fears for Fred, out there in the snow somewhere — for these people had sought to set aside my fears for him by telling me that loaded teams did not travel in this country by night.

I tried to sleep. I could not. I sought to rest by closing my eyes. The lids burned when they touched; I merely lay there and watched the dim window for dawn. Then, tired, haggard, I arose and helped the worn little woman with her work, at last to thrill with the clink of harness. Fred! I ran out of the door to him, and he ran to meet me, for he had not slept either. For a long moment we stood clasped in each other's arms, survivors after a night of travail —

To-day I look back with a bit of cynicism at our concern over a trifling thing. Since that day, Fred and I have really learned what it means to suffer!

It had been an awakening, however; there was little of proud planning as the teams made their weary way up the trail toward Burnt Mountain, fighting doggedly against newly piled drifts which had swept in since our first visit. A drag of six miles and a transfer was made to sleds, conveni-

ently awaiting by a deserted cabin — one takes but little when one gives up the ghost in homesteading. Then onward, with determination taking the place of our former enthusiasm; at last, just as the sun dropped, to reach the place that was to be our home.

There was little ceremony about our arrival. The man and boy had decided to spend the night at the house of a friend eight miles down the trail, and to that end they tossed boxes and bales from their "slides" with more abandon than care. Then a gruff "thank you" in return for their pay, a clucking to their horses and they were gone, leaving Fred and me — in our castle.

The frail shack was dismal and foreboding. The boxes and bales loomed before us, shadowy bulks in the growing darkness. Outside, the cow bawled dolorously; the dogs whined and gathered close to us. But Fred and I merely sat there, silent, each of us with our thoughts.

The thrill of expectancy, of dreaming, was over. We were there — facing realities. No more the imaginations; the facts were before us. A sob rose in my throat; I choked it back. Beside me in the blackness, I could hear the faint sound of Fred rubbing his hands, palm against palm, back and forth, back and forth. Then suddenly, he rose.

"Honey!" he said as if it were the conclusion of a long conversation, "nobody gets anything

without working for it. Other folks have gotten along. I guess we can. Guess I'd better look after the cow."

"I'll help you," I said eagerly. Something else to think about! Strange how the mind longs to take itself from its own troubles by looking after the troubles of others. We fought away our own premonitions, in our concern for those who could not help themselves, our cow, our dogs, our chickens, all suddenly welcome dependents. Fred found the lantern and lighted it. Then hurriedly we set up the little stove we had brought with us, "broke" a bale of hay, fed the cow, and while the snow melted in the coffeepot, we hauled in our goods and provisions.

What a sight! Boxes and crates were scattered about the little room; there was hardly enough room for us to turn. We ate from the top of one of them when our meager dinner was cooked, the dogs begging beside us. Then, at last, the dishes stacked, we turned to the making of our bed — merely comforters piled on top of boxes — at last to halt at the sound of a shout from without. A moment more and a young man, padding his way atop the snow on homemade "webs" or snowshoes, leaned in the door.

"I'm your nearest neighbor," he said. "Live over east on Little Bear. Heard about you folks coming up here and knew you would n't be fixed

up. So my wife and I thought we'd ask you over to-morrow for Christmas dinner."

Christmas dinner! And this was Christmas Eve! I had forgotten it. I turned away to hide the tears which had suddenly come into my eyes. Christmas Eve when, of all times of the year, the thought of home is nearest one. When surroundings should radiate happiness, when there should be comfort and peace and bright logs blazing in the fireplace! Again I glanced about the squalid little place, with its shadowy boxes, its bales, its disconsolate dogs twisting and turning in their efforts to find a place of comfort. At the door, the men talked on, Fred accepting the invitation. Again I forced back the tears and with sudden resolution fumbled in a suitcase, then went to a box. A moment more, and our visitor departed; traveling at night in the high hills is a thing best accomplished as soon as possible. Fred, holding the lantern high above his head, stood at the door until the man was out of sight, then turned slowly. I faced him.

"It's Christmas Eve, Fred," I said.

"I know, Honey," came quietly.

And I waited — waited and hoped. Hoped for the recriminations that he would pile upon me for this mad dream which had brought us to this hovel. Hoped for the outburst that would break the last shred of my determination. But it did not come. What was the use? The bridge had been

crossed; we were there, facing the inevitable. There came a slight shrug of the shoulders, a smile, a pat on the arm.

"We'll make it all right, Honey," he said. "It is n't your fault. I should have known, too. We'll make it all right. Don't you worry."

I did not answer. I could n't. I merely took the Red Cross sticker which I had retrieved from my case, and pasted it to one of the tiny windows. Then behind it I put a tallow candle. Fred silently extinguished the lantern, then moved beside me and lighted the candle — our greetings to the Kaiser in that little red cross, stalwart in the window of this little hovel — and in the flickering candle, perchance a beacon light if He, Whom they say walks the earth that night, should pass this way over the mountain.

As for us, we sat in the faint light watching it, a brave little candle shining behind a brave little cross, and someway it gave us courage, courage enough for the blow that was to fall the next day.

But a night must intervene; of a sort which I did not believe possible. At last the candle guttered and Fred extinguished it; then in the darkness, weary, discouraged, we turned to our makeshift bed, but only to doze in fitful snatches. The wind shrieked through the great, open gaps in the logs, the dogs stirred ceaselessly, whining their discomfort. Suddenly I was startled out of my uneasy

rest by a sharp nip on a finger. It brought a scream, and Fred hurriedly arose and lit the lantern, the light of which disclosed a trickle of blood from a tiny wound. Across the room the dogs moved menacing forward, growling the while, as something with gleaming eyes scurried to a hole in the corner.

"Pack rats!" said Fred. "There's no more sleep for us to-night."

I shivered at the thoughts of them; carnivorous mountain rodents as large as half-grown cats; strange how the unknown, the revolting, can affect one. I who had faced lions and tigers and leopards in the same arena, who had even been torn by the fierce claws of a mad beast, and still gone smiling through the rest of the performance! In the morning, when I reached for my clothing, I found a great hole gnawed in my skirt, a shoe had been dragged to the hole through which the vicious rodents had entered the cabin, and one stocking was missing entirely. It was not a good beginning for Christmas Day.

Nor was the continuance of that Christmas any better. Tired, dull from practically forty-eight hours without restful sleep, I went doggedly about the job of unpacking, while Fred, equally fatigued, with hammer and nails and strips of tin, made the cabin rat-proof and cleared the place of the empty crates and boxes, until finally it had

at least a semblance of a livable abode. Then, guided by the tracks of the snowshoes, we wallowed three miles through the drifts to the tiny cabin of two persons who quickly became Dan and Eva — a careening place where the rotting of the under logs had caused innumerable "settlings" until it leaned at all angles. The snow, lifted from the drifts by the incessant wind, sifted into the cracks despite the paper chinkings. The girl — she was little more — caught my glance.

"Oh, that's nothing," she said disconsolately. "After a stormy night, we always shake the snow from our bed clothing. Folks get used to lots of things when they're homesteading."

I winced, then turned the conversation to other things, — to the strings of greenery with which the little cabin was decorated, the little Christmas tree with its strings of popcorn, and to the exclusion of all other thoughts in the enjoyment of this backwoods Christmas.

Over at the other end of the cabin, the men talked of the big thing, the war, then veered to the subject of homesteading. Gradually their voices dropped lower and lower; once I saw Fred nod in my direction, as if in signal to Dan to soften his voice so that I might not hear. The dinner was served — a truly delicious thing of jerked venison, processed wild fowl, canned in season by the thrifty little woman, and a dozen other delicacies which

were new to us; chokecherry wine, baked wild rabbit; even shortcake from home-canned wild strawberries that grew in summer upon the mountain side. At last we left, my happiness renewed. But Fred was silent on the journey homeward.

"Honey," he said, when his chores were done, and I was striving to figure a way to cut some curtains for the tiny windows, "I guess we didn't learn as much as we thought we did, knocking around the world all those years with the circus. I've got bad news."

"Bad news?" I was on my feet in an instant. Fred nodded.

"Those real-estate agents. We didn't buy a homestead relinquishment at all. There was a trick clause in that contract. Dan showed it to me. We haven't even got the half-interest in that machinery. Knuteson, the fellow who had this place, didn't keep up the payments, and Dan had to take it over. As to the place here, it isn't even open for homesteading. It's in the Forest Reserve — and all we've got is a squatter's right!"

"Which means —?"

"Nothing, as far as that's concerned. There's just one chance — he's taking it, since he's in the same boat that we're in — and that is that a strip through here may be thrown open for entry later, and we'll have first claim on it."

After that, it seemed there was little to say. We

who were world traveled, and world wise, had bought a gold brick! More, there was no recourse to the agents; they had protected themselves in the contract, as agents so often do. We were merely "squatters" — a term which to me had always meant squalor and utmost poverty, carrying as it did a mental picture of those shacks which one sees along the banks of large rivers. Squatters, and our money gone — for a tumbledown shack.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

But there was nothing to do but stay, and to take our chance. Fred saw it; I saw it. Already we had invested more than fifteen hundred dollars in our venture, counting our preparations, freight, and the numerous other expenses which had entered into our scheme of things. I laughed bitterly.

"We'll at least have the experience of a winter in the woods," I said. Fred's answer was to set forth the next morning to the "spotting" of huge quaker trees which were to form the sides of our new home, then to search for aid in his labors, while I strove to keep my thoughts occupied with attempts to make the present shack — it was little else — more livable.

High up on Burnt Mountain was a tiny sawmill, and there Fred found a man who would haul down the sidings, slabs and other necessaries for the new cabin. By Dan, going down to the mailbox at the main road twelve miles away, from which letters were dispatched by sled-stage, we sent an order to Denver for casings, glass, doors, flooring and nails. In the meantime, with the aid of a man from the main road, Fred, working night and

day, rolled the eaves logs into position and raised the sides.

We had walked together down to the rise in the trail to watch the slow-moving sled coming upward from the main road with the roofing, flooring and other necessities, just arrived from Denver. We were happy — happier than we had been in days. A real house was in the offing. At least there — it was to have three rooms, with a veranda — we would have space in which to turn around. We could get up some of our possessions from Denver — things which we had left behind in storage. We could have our books. And our mementoes of days of the circus. We could —

A sudden spat of white fluttered down against us from lowering, gray clouds. The wind rose suddenly. When at last the sled arrived, it was through a winding sheet of white, and the grizzled teamster looked upward with apprehension.

"You won't put this up for awhile," he said. "It'll be a week before this clears. Move fast on this unloadin', Alispaw! I've got to get down to the road before the snow lays too deep for this slide to travel!"

An hour and he was gone, while in the darkness of the night, Fred and I went forth time after time, just in hope of seeing the brightness of close-twinkling stars. But there was only the white, swirling viciously — and the whine of the ceaseless wind.

Morning brought no cessation, nor night, nor morning, nor night again. And when the skies finally cleared, our little shack was a hidden thing, merely a higher mound in an unrelieved vista of snow, for all the world like an Eskimo igloo; the spiral of smoke from the chimney seemed to issue from nothing more than a snowdrift.

Our windows were things of blank white. It required hours of shoveling to trench our way to the tiny corral with its "slab" cow shelter. Almost before realizing it, I found myself working side by side with Fred, wielding the shovel as long as my strength lasted, resting, then returning anew to the task.

Then there was nothing to do. Nothing to do! One who has not experienced it cannot realize what such a thing can mean: merely to sit and look at fields of unending white, against which the sun seemed to make no impression, and which every gust of wind turned to a newly vicious, fine-flaked blizzard, deepening the drifts, but never being able, it seemed, to lay bare the ground from which the snow was taken.

The utter loneliness of it took possession of both of us. We spoke but little; merely sat there staring, or walked about the little shanty, or stood for hours, it seemed, looking out the window. There was nothing to read — save the alluring pages of a mail-order catalogue, and that could only

emphasize our situation by picturing to us the thousand and one things which we would like to have — but could not. At last Fred, with whetstone ever handy, began work upon four long pieces of hard wood, gleaned from our shipment from Denver, sticking laboriously hour after hour at his whittling, until his hands numbed, and his eyes blazed with headache from his constant, cramped position as he bent over his task.

We talked little of his work; it was self-evident. He was making skis, rude though they might be, out of wood far too large to be steamed into shape, yet our only possible hope of escape from this prison into which winter had thrown us.

It seemed that the world which we had known all our lives had suddenly been wiped out — like a thing which never had existed. Friends to whom I had said good-by only a short month or so before seemed like persons dead for years. Scenes which I had visited in the past were vague in my mind, hazy of recollection. All I could think of, all I could realize, was that I was in some strange place where the mornings were things of indescribable gloom as a vague sun struggled upward, at last to send its faint rays into this pocket, fight valiantly for a time, then by four o'clock in the afternoon give up the battle and make way for night. The little cow corral stood on a sharp rise above the shack and here, when darkness came, I would go

and lean on the bars, staring like a starved soul toward the bare pinnacles of Mount Osa. Such a thing as sunset was denied us in the pocket; the shadows simply fell and it was night. But there on the peak — our oasis in this desert of white — I could see the reflection of the dying sun long after it was night in our prison, and there I would stand until the last blood-red glow had vanished and nothing was left but the lamp gleaming in the hovel where Fred, eyes close to his work, still whittled and sharpened his knife, sharpened his knife and whittled anew.

Meanwhile, I tried to interest myself in things which had held my attention in other days. I spent hours on my nails and hands and hair: day after day, the same thing, the same routine, the same attempts at eradication of the effects of dish-water, and of the hundred and one tasks which had come to me, almost without realization. I brought forth my dresses, which I had lugged from Denver, and pampered myself like a child by changing from one to another. Then I gave it up. There was no one to see; only Fred bending constantly over his grueling task of whittling; only the dogs, only the cow up there in the slab corral, and the white world beyond, stretching ceaselessly, remorselessly. No one to see — no one to applaud! For the first time in my life, I realized how much a woman lives for praise, whether she

be a performer or the most drab housewife. Applause! Appreciation! Flattery — even if it be nown as such!

But there was none of it here. Nothing but stillness, Arctic stillness in this gaunt expanse, and a feeling of utter desolation which could not be fought away. The days were like entombed things; there were no birds at this time in these frozen heights, no signs of living things save ourselves and our possessions, no bark of squirrel, not even a fleeting sight of a rabbit. At night, the coyote packs screeched and shrieked from the ridges, their long-drawn-out wails echoing and reëchoing from peak to peak, while the dogs howled in answer, and there was no silencing them.

Day after day, while Fred and I spoke but little, it was as though some tremendous force had closed down upon us, wiping thoughts from our brains and making conversation impossible. This coupled with a strange feeling of resentment, each for the actions of the other; our nerves were beginning to be fringed with sharp edges; Fred whittled until bedtime now and I watched the shavings fall, one by one, like the carving away of a barrier. At last they were done, the straps were attached and we went forth to our first self-given lessons. Hour after hour we kept at it, while our ankles ached and our backs seemed at the breaking point. It was a means of escape and gradually we mastered

it. But the new snow came again, two feet d and soft. Even the skis were impossible fo time, except for short distances.

We turned desperately now to the house. Silly of course — to attempt to work in such weat as this. But work we must have, both of Pretty hands were forgotten now. Dresses a I put on man's clothing, with no more thou than thanksgiving that it would lead to work, the occupation of my mind. Out we went into the snow, shoveling side by side, until tons of it were heaped about the walls of the new cabin. Together, man and man, we worked at the roofing, I handing up the heavy boards to Fred who put them in place, then crawling up beside him that I might hold them while he did the nailing. Slow work, grueling work, with the temperature more often than not at zero, but we kept at it, two silent beings who were glad of labor, simply that they might forget the fact that they were prisoners. Then the snow packed, and with it, Dan passed, with joyous news. There was to be a "war meeting" the next night, twelve miles away. A sled would pick us up three miles down if we wanted to go.

If we wanted to go! We tossed and turned that night in sleepless excitement. To see people again. To mingle with them. To hear human voices other than our own. To hear laughter! To be surrounded

by happiness! I rose early the next morning and baked a cake. Then Fred and I dressed with the fidgety nervousness of children attending their first party. Long before the time, weaving on aching ankles from our first long excursion on skis, we were at the gathering place, waiting to pile aboard the sled, to accept as old friends persons whom we never before had seen — "nesters" like ourselves, gathering from a radius of a dozen miles. Then, the hoofs of the horses crunching in the crisp snow, the sled runners screeching, we went over the hill to a ranch house which was to form the meeting place of the "War Party", a gathering at which a young banker of Roadstop with whom we had made our deposit when we reached the town was to make a speech in the interest of a Liberty Loan Drive.

The ranch house was a small place; I could not help wondering where everybody was to be accommodated. They were arriving by the score, it seemed, when we got there; I noted that most of the women, many of whom came on horseback, were attired in overalls, carrying their dresses in flour sacks tied to the horns of their saddles, while their food donations were rolled in coats and tied across the back of the saddles to insure them against pounding or crumbling. Everybody seemed to know everybody else. There was no formality. Like the women, the men were partial to overalls,

especially the cowboys, and the higher they rolled them, the more dressed they seemed to feel.

There was no exchange of names with the ranch wife when I met her; there was little time for formality. I was shown into the sleeping room, where the women were changing from their overalls to their dresses and putting their children to sleep, all upon the one bed. There seemed to be dozens of them; like a person in a dream, I wondered how the mothers would find their own babies again when the party was over; all of them seemed to look alike. But the thought was lost in a general scramble as a voice of command sounded through the house:

"Everybody out to the barn. The party's on!"

We went forth pell-mell, to climb the ladder into the loft of the barn where, the floor swept clean, planks nailed along the walls for seats, smoking lanterns and candles shedding an uncertain light, the "party" was to be held. Below, the horses stamped and whinnied and munched their hay. Through the square opening of the "hay door", the white mountains lay, indescribably beautiful in the moonlight — serene yet vicious, quiet yet vociferously indicative of the sacrifices which this childishly happy group of people were making for a cause; many of them had fought through fifty miles of those white, beautiful, cruel upraises that they might be here

to-night to give of their meager funds for a Liberty Bond.

But there was little time for soliloquizing. The music was on — furnished by a cowboy at a diminutive folding organ — "Soap Box Music", as we called it in the theatrical profession. Everybody danced, sweethearts unabashed in their open love-making; grandmothers, even small children barely large enough to understand the changes of the old-fashioned "Squares." High upon a box, a "caller" rasped and yelled his figures, shaking his head with every vociferation and waving his hands for emphasis:

"Cows in the 'falfy
Pigs in th' sty,
Hosses in th' corral
Seven rails high —
Swing-g-g-g-g-g yo' podner an'
Do se do!"

And in the midst of it Fred and myself, dancing a square dance for the first time in our lives, giggling like children at our mistakes, then frantically flying onward to the next number. Wild dance after wild dance and then the call:

"Let's eat!"

A general scramble down the ladderway and on to the cabin, where wash boilers of coffee awaited, and plank tables heaped with the food contributions of a countryside. And after that came the

general meeting before the speeches and the sale of Liberty Bonds.

The young banker introduced Fred and myself — although there was little need. Everybody knew we were the "lion tamers"; word seems to travel by some queer form of radio in the homestead country. The people looked at us, frankly curious. Some of them admitted surprise that we were just ordinary persons, after all. And finally I found myself talking to a smiling little old woman, her face seamed by the wrinkles of hardships and of suffering.

"So they call you 'The Bravest Woman in the World', according to the papers," she said. I laughed.

"Every one has to have a name in the profession," I answered.

She glanced up at me.

"Is it only a name?"

"Well — I hope that I deserved it."

Then she patted me on the arm.

"Child," she said, "you at least have a good chance to prove it out here. You know, don't you," she asked suddenly, "the saying they have in this country about folks like yourself? Folks, you know, who come into a strange, hard land without any preparation for it — and who think they'll get along somehow? No? Well, they say", she went on quietly, "that if a woman like yourself — used to things, you know — comes to this

country and stays here six years, she'll do one of three things. She'll run away with another man, she'll kill her husband or — *she'll kill herself!*"

I gasped at the coldness of the assertion.

"Is — is the country that horrible?" I asked. The woman smiled.

"It is n't the country," she answered. "It's the woman. She's been used to things all her life. She has n't known hardships. Then she comes out here where she has to live a man's life and do a man's work and stand a man's hardships — and the strain's too great. I came out here when I was a little girl. I've seen more than one like you come — and go."

I moved away. But the thought of her haunted me. I wished for the party to be over. When the speech-making came, I heard but little of it; instead that sentence ran again and again through my brain. I joined Fred in his call for Liberty Bonds like a person detached. The journey homeward was a silent thing on my part. Because I felt that what the little old woman had said— was true!

The shack looked less inviting than ever. The coyotes howled that night as if with glee over a new victim. The next day, when Fred decided to ski over to Dan's in the hope that he had brought up our mail from the main road, I asked to accompany him. To stay alone in that cabin — with this new thought, this new threat —!

We encompassed the distance across to Little

Bear easily, on close-packed snow which seemed to glide beneath our skis. But as we started homeward, the clouds which had been massing all day swung loose with the fury of a new blizzard; soon we were but filmy things of coated white, struggling against the gale. A mile, and we were forcing our way against a good six inches of new-fallen snow. Another mile of dragging progress, and the new fall was ten inches deep, with our skis sinking far into it and the soft white clinging to the bottoms, blocking speed. Fred swung ahead of me, endeavoring to pack a path, and I strove to follow his tracks. Impossible. Fatigue was overcoming me now, the steady lift and pull, lift and pull, the difficulty of keeping balance, the herculean efforts against the steady sweep of the frigid gale; all these things were forming an overpowering obstacle. I wavered, then straightened to new endeavors. I tried to smile my optimism when Fred looked back, frankly anxious. Onward, more slowly onward. I staggered and fell, but succeeded in picking myself up before Fred could turn and notice. Slower — slower — my pace grew; my skis had become as lead, my muscles were deadening.

But my brain was alive! Alive to the picture of a little old woman who seemed to leer at me. To mock me. To repeat and re-repeat the three alternatives which were mine. I floundered on and sank again. Fred came back to me.

"We're only a half mile from home!" he begged. "Try to get the strength to make it!"

I muttered something and rose — only to drop again. I was drowsy; vaguely I heard Fred's voice and felt him shaking me. Then this ceased. After a long time, I raised my head, slowly, like one emerging for an instant from a drunken stupor. I noticed hazily that the mail sack had been thrown over me, and Fred's coat. Fred himself was gone — there was only the swirling white, fast effacing the marks of skis. I was alone.

Except for a haunting face and a haunting memory. And three alternatives which seemed to mock me like human things. I laughed at them — in silly, drooling fashion. What did I care? I was drowsy. I wanted to sleep — even though I knew what that sleep meant. Dully I strove to rub the snow out of my eyes, as though it were closing them. I mumbled soddenly. My head drooped, while the haunting sentence ran like some mad refrain through my brain: one of three things, one of three things — you'll —

"Or die in a blizzard," I mumbled.

Slowly the white world about me grew gray — as I barely glimpsed it through my lashes. Then it grew darker, darker, and faded entirely in the delicious blackness of the merciful sleep by which persons move slowly, blissfully, into the rigidity of frozen death.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It was with a grudging realization that I returned to consciousness. It had been so good to sleep, to forget; yet the steady slapping continued, the vague knowledge of a burning sensation as some hot fluid was forced down my throat. At last, hazily awake, I found Fred bending over me in the darkness, for night had come, urging me to take more of the hot toddy which he had brought to me from the house, a half mile away.

"I did n't know what to do," he confessed, once I had regained a portion of my strength. "I thought of carrying you, but my skis were sinking so deep into the snow, I knew it was impossible. Then it just simmered down to a proposition of reviving you, so I hurried for the house."

He had brought blankets upon his back, and a tiny alcohol stove which had been a left-over from our circus days, when, on long runs between show stands, I often had prepared some chafing-dish recipe upon it in the sleeping car, to stay our appetites until arrival. At last, swaddled in blankets, I sat up, the little stove was relighted while the falling snow sizzled against its flame, and Fred,

cheerily attempting to make a mere adventure of it, set about heating snow water for an additional "toddy" — such things were permissible then. At last, I forced myself to take on a portion of his assumed spirit of gaiety, and late that night we were home again, where I was placed in bed for a day, with ample application of remedies against frost-bitten hands and feet.

However, it all had been more of a matter of exhaustion, both physical and mental, than of danger from cold, and as I lay there, I strove to reason it out.

I, who had been called "The Bravest Woman in the World", had failed in a physical encounter! I, who once had fallen from the top of an upright elephant's head, to so injure a hip that it required months of leather braces to hold it steady enough for me to walk, yet who, that day, had finished my performance! I, who bore on my body the scars of lion's claws, of tiger's talons and teeth of leopards; who had taken these wounds as merely part of a day's work — I had been found wanting. And I knew why! because it had not been a matter of the physique, after all, but a thing of the brain, and for the first time in my life, I realized what a controlling factor the mind can be. Let it weaken and the whole structure falls!

So a new battle began — a battle against my own mind and the thought within it; the fact that my

life out here was a predetermined failure, that only one of three things lay before me. For that haunting prophecy remained:

"For a woman like you who comes into this country and stays six years, there is only one of three things: you'll run away with another man, you'll kill your husband or you'll kill yourself!"

I knew there was only one thing to do — to work until my brain could think of nothing else. There was no other avenue to which I could turn: no interests, no outside thoughts. As far as the world was concerned, it was a far-away thing, not to be heard from until the news of it was stale and passé. Even the progress of the war was from a week to ten days old by the time we gained it — and sometimes we did not hear at all for weeks. A daily paper was out of the question; nobody had the strength or stamina in that country to make the twelve miles down to the main road on skis and twelve miles back again every few days in the hope of getting mail. Instead, in that snow-bound country, getting the mail was a matter of turn-about. Once or twice a week, whenever the stage could negotiate the thirty miles, the mail was sent out of Roadstop, to travel as far as possible by automobile, then to be transferred to a wagon, and finally to be loaded upon a bobsled and thus be brought to the dry-goods box which answered as the community mail center at the main road.

When there was snow, followed by melting, that was unfortunate — for the water seeped through the insufficient protection, leaving nothing but a sodden mass. But even that was welcome, and once a week, one of the three men who formed the heads of the families living in our remote section, would take his turn at gliding the twenty-four miles down to the mail box and back — to return empty-handed as often as not.

Too, strangely enough, there was little desire to read. My brain felt heavy, resentful against outside thoughts — as though I were jealous of those who lived in ease and contentment and comfort. So it was to work that I turned — man's work, and the harder the better.

It was too much to hope that the snow would disappear; it seemed that it would continue forever. But there were days when the sun shone, cold and tantalizing, or when the skies were merely gray without precipitation, and upon those days, Fred and I worked side by side upon the roofing of the house, at last to complete it. Then, while he turned to the labors of setting the casements, I took upon myself the task of chinking.

A log house without chinking is like a gate without a lock. Logs simply refuse to fit tightly against each other, and it is only by carefully closing every crevice that anything like warmth or comfort may be obtained. The secret came from

our neighbors; in fact, every possible moment we could spare, Fred and I spent in their company, that we might learn the things by which we could fight out the years necessary to our success. From Dan and from Bates, another neighbor, came to Fred the fruits of their experience in their attempts to farm this bitter region. From Eva I gained, first the secret of cooking — it had been a failure heretofore, with biscuits which insisted on floating over the entire oven, coffee which tasted like dishwater, beans which simply refused to be anything except so many tiny stones, potatoes which contained a core as hard as flint in spite of my many experiments. The secret, let it be known, was altitude — we were eight thousand feet above sea level — with a much lower boiling point and consequently less cooking heat to be sent into the foods. As for the biscuits, the average amount of baking powder was simply disastrous. These things I learned and many others.

"Zora," said Eva one day, "a woman does n't realize how great her portion of homesteading must be until she finds out what a big part she's playing in her husband's failure. Whether you ever do an active lick of work or not in the progress of your ranch, you've got to remember this: half of homesteading lies right in the kitchen! If that kitchen tries to live from a store, your husband is going to fail, just as sure as God made little green apples.

AFTER THE DRESS-UP DAYS. ZORA AT THE GATEWAY OF HER RANCH HOME

You've got to live from everything around you."

So the recipes were garnered; how to preserve the wild strawberries, if ever there came a time when this world would be free of snow. How to make chokecherry jelly, and conserves from the fruit of the service brush — they call it "sarvis" here. How to can practically everything grown in the mountain region, to "put down" rabbits and venison and sage fowl. How to cure hams and bacon — for in the future I must do these things also. How to make cheese and pickles — it seemed an endless schooling in the preserving business, but I could see its logic, and I was obedient in my study. But right now the job was to chink a cabin, and, following instructions, I gathered every possible bit of paper I could find, even going forth and digging into the snowdrifts to retrieve the wrappings from many of our bundles, discarded when we first arrived. Then to a task of paper-tearing which lasted for days, until my fingers were raw, until my hands and my back and my eyes ached as from the effects of consuming fever. Day after day, tearing cardboard to bits, or wrapping paper or pieces of boxes, mixing them with water in an earthen jar and with a stick, pounding them slowly to a pulp: such was my task until at last the spongy mass could be applied to the interstices between the logs and there allowed to dry into a wind-proof cement. Between these sessions

came the churning, the washing, the feeding of the cow and the chickens, that Fred might have an hour or so more in which to work upon our new home — a routine which began early in the morning and lasted until late at night, and much of that routine on skis. I even hung out the washing by this method, pushing the pan which held the clothing along the snow by holding it between my skis. One day we happened to remember the date — the calendar had been of little avail to us. Fred rose and walked to the window, staring dully out at the interminable drifts.

"It's coming along spring, down in regular country," he said.

There was something of hopelessness in his voice which I tried not to notice. I failed. It remained with me. Spring — it was late in April now — but here the snow lay as deep as ever, nor could the strengthening sun do more than slightly melt the top of it sufficiently to form a crust heavy enough to bear our burdens for a few hours in the morning. But that crust helped us, nevertheless.

The stock of feed for the one cow had diminished to almost nothing. Fred had ordered more from Roadstop, and each day now was traveling in the afternoon upon his skis to the furthermost point of the wagon road, four miles away. One day he did not come home at the usual time. I watched for him vainly. Evening came. Then quickly

descended night, bringing soon afterward the moon. Then, in the distance, I saw a misshapen, struggling creature fighting his way upward, halting and weaving in his fatigue, then assuming his unwieldy burden and moving slowly onward again. It was Fred, ending a journey of four miles on skis, with a fifty-pound bale of hay upon his back.

"But there's no other way!" he argued, when I remonstrated with him against the terrific task which he had set for himself. "We can't haul it; no sled can break through these drifts."

"But there is a way; there must be a way," I replied, and together we sat down to figure it out. While we talked, something kept rising within my brain—some vague picture. At last I hurried for the mail-order catalogue. It was in there—if I could find it. We searched the pages together, at last to stop at one devoted to winter sports. What I had been thinking about was a flat-bottomed toboggan!

Small sport indeed would there be in it now. The next morning, Fred and I, taking light pieces of flooring for the base, built as wieldy a toboggan as possible. Then we attached ropes and went forth. That day, working together like horses instead of human beings, we dragged upward over the precipitous grades and heavy drifts to the homestead cabin two hundred pounds of hay and a sack of oats, then gave up the task until the next

day, when the snow should crust again. Once, as we halted, I remarked sarcastically:

"A little different from our old entrance into the ring, is n't it?"

Fred said nothing; only looked far into the distance, where a spiral was rising, forty miles away, from a brush fire. It was spring even down there, down in the sagebrush country. The first clearing of the year was being made. But up here —

Silently we turned to our rope harnesses once more and began the slow, dragging process upward, upward, into deeper snows, deeper gloom. But it was our only possible means of salvation.

In the same way, when our food ran short and a new amount was necessary from Roadstop, we hauled our supplies upward, Fred and I, tugging and panting side by side, mere beasts of burden now, two human beings metamorphosed into dumb animals that, as dumb animals, we might live. Then, the task completed, we turned anew to the house and at last saw it completed. But that finished, we did not send to Denver for the better furniture which now lay in storage and which we once had dreamed would fit out our new home. What was the use? We were squatters, without a right in law, with not even legal possession of the home we had built for ourselves! The second-hand articles must suffice.

"We ought to have a housewarming, Fred," I

laughed, with an attempt at gaiety, once we had made the change from the hovel to the more comfortable cabin. "Or at least a celebration."

As if by mutual consent, we looked out the window. It was n't a celebration in the house we wanted. There was but one craving in both our hearts. We wanted to touch ground — to feel the earth again; to know that there was something in the world beside the white of snow and the silence of winter-bound fastnesses. The next morning we arose early and packed a lunch. Then, calling to the dogs, we started forth over the hard crusted snow, on the climb to Mount Osa.

Higher, higher, with the brown goal ever before us, beckoning us, giving us giddy thoughts, childish frivolities. Like a boy at play, Fred broke the crust of the snow, and running after me, threw a handful down my neck, while I remonstrated with outbursts of giggly screaming, and while the dogs danced and barked their joy. On the way to see the earth again, to feel the touch of it, even though it be the bare-swept pinnacle of a bleak mountain! Upward, upward!

Then Fred bent suddenly forward, seized a double handful of silt, and merely stood there, letting it run through his fingers. Earth! The dirt beneath our feet — and yet we worshipped it! It formed our celebration.

The earth here, and the earth far in the distance,

across the fields of white, stretching out toward Utah from the valley of the Fortification. We looked out upon it with a feeling almost of awe. It was springtime down there. Far in the hazy distance, we could see the vague outlines of Roadstop. Then the brown tints of the sagebrush, and here and there, like unbelievable mirages, patches of green, where labor of the past was bearing fruit, and upon some "brusher's" tract, the alfalfa was sprouting. Here and there too, tiny white specks showed, and Fred brought forth his field glasses, to stare through them and then to hand them to me.

Spring had indeed come in the lower country, for those white specks were the tents of homesteaders, hopeful also, spreading out into the brush country for the building of a future community.

Spring! It gave us strange thoughts. Of the circus, and the red wagons rolling on and off the lot, the blaring of the band during the sparkling hours of parade, the lights at night, and the sight of the big top from across the circus ground, like a tremendous mushroom which had been illuminated from within. Spring, and the throngs along the curbings, the hum of the tremendous audiences, packed atop the tiers, the rough gar — oo, gar — oo, of the lions, the hissing of the tigers and purr of the leopards. Spring, and the "bull line" — elephants are always bulls to the circus — strung

out along the line of march, and Fred riding beside them on his faithful old elephant horse. The chatter of the dressing tent, the gathering of performers at the flags for their next entrance.

And there we stood, two silent children of the soil, gazing at a thing which we could not possess. For we were still of the Arctic. After a while, I heard a whine behind me and noticed that the dogs, which had been frolicking heretofore, had settled and also were gazing out over the dazzling fields of white toward the softness of the lower country. The wind was from below; their noses twitched. I wondered if they could catch the scent of growing things with those sensitive nostrils, if — but Fred voiced the thought for me!

"Watching for the circus trains that are n't ever going to show up," he said huskily. After that we did not take so much enjoyment in looking below. We knew that it would only make our own surroundings seem more miserable.

Yet the trip had its effects, in more ways than one. For a few days Fred worked nervously about the place, then with a sudden decision announced a trip to Denver to buy milk cows; we had already learned that it would be next to impossible to attempt to adhere to our original idea of a straight cattle proposition up here, without a lower feeding ground to which to send our stock in the more bitter months. But with milk stock giving a

steady revenue, there would be a chance to make at least a living, and Fred felt that the time had come to buy them.

"It'll take me two weeks," he said. "Surely the snow will be gone by then."

"Surely," I answered, and the next day I kissed him good-by, and stood in the door to watch, as grip strapped upon his shoulders, he started forth upon his skis — toward the land of spring.

A day or so afterward, I followed him — but not to Denver. Eva had come by the cabin, on snowshoes, and there was the same hunger in her eyes that I knew was in mine. Together we made the distance below, eight long miles, to a point where winter had ended, and where summer had come as suddenly. For at the very edge of the snowdrifts were blooming the sturdy and short-stemmed Alpine buttercups, and the "salt and pepper plants", forerunners of others to come. We knelt and touched them, bending to catch the faint odor of their blooms. But we did not pick them. It would have been sacrilege.

"Spring will break just like this for us up there," Eva said. "It does n't look it now — but the sun goes clear through. It'll crumble from beneath."

But there seemed little likelihood when we went home again, wallowing for a time through slushy drifts, then striking the hardness of our Arctic wastes once more. And as we made the distance,

I noticed that Nosey turned back once or twice, as if loath to leave the springtime. Nosey, whose life had been of her own choosing, who had come to the circus as a stray, outwitting every effort to drive her away. But I put aside the thought that a dog could know, that one touch of springtime could —

Three days later, I received my answer. I called Nosey in vain when, at the beginning of the day, I summoned the dogs from the shack which once had been our home. Scotty answered, toddling along upon her short little legs. Puppy, the elephant dog, also obeyed. But there was no Nosey, and that night when the coyotes ran, I thought I detected the sound of barking mingled with the eerie shrieks of the wild animals. The next morning my suspicions were confirmed, when, gliding across the snow, I found the tracks of the pack and separated one set of paws from the rest. Nosey had heard the call of "out there" and answered it — even though it led to the ways of the wild. At least, the coyotes only came to the snow when they chose. There were rabbits and birds and calf-weakened cows in the softer land of the lower country now. It made me strangely lonely. It hurt, like a friend found faithless; or worse, like being found faithless by a friend. That we must follow an existence that even a dog would desert! I sobbed that night, for one of the few times of my

life. While, from far in the distance, came the weird shrieking of the coyote packs; a ghostly obligato for the barking of a dog!

After that I watched more than ever for spring, and prayed for it. But Fred returned only to find the same white wastes, and the galling knowledge that he must leave his carload of Holsteins and a shipment of hogs upon paid pasture until a future date — when the springtime came. And this was the last day of May.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WAITING — waiting! The hours were days, the days were weeks. Then like the unfolding of a curtain, it came! There had been two feet of snow upon the level the day before. There still remained drifts which in places reared themselves above one's head. But out there in the "park", as we called a little open space near the cabin, was clear ground, free ground, sparkling with newly melted moisture, and I called, with a break in my voice:

"Fred! The flowers are blooming! The flowers are blooming!"

The sturdy little Alpines had blossomed, it seemed, with the first touch of the sun. It was winter no longer; it was not even spring; summer had come, all in a night and a day. Such is the sudden transition of this land of heights.

It meant work — joyous, gladsome work, even though it were hard labor. As far as help was concerned, none was available. Every one who had not been called to the war was in his own frenzy of preparation. And so, while Fred, on the hill above me, began the fencing operations necessary to the handling of his cattle, I turned to, like the laborer I gradually had become — at the plow!

It was agony for the first few days. The heavy implement careened first to one side, then the other, against my every effort to guide it. I found myself involuntarily trying to push it through the ground, instead of merely balancing it while the team of horses, which Fred had brought up, together with saddle horses, in advance of his stock, did the real work. It insisted on nosing its way into rotten stumps and hanging there until, rocking with fatigue, I would at last call Fred to extricate me. But a large garden was necessary, if we were to live the following winter. There was not a moment to be wasted in the planting of potatoes, onions, turnips and other staples. Fred could not do it. There was no one else, and I learned my task in aching muscles and dragging limbs, agonizing ankles, strained because of the unevenness of furrows, and shoulders as sore as boils — wrenched with eight hours a day of tugging and pulling at the handles of a steel-shared plow. And it lasted until the last foot of soil was turned under — when I might change to the bending and stooping of planting. That completed, I might go to still other labors beside my husband.

There was the wire, the wire, the wire — stretching everywhere it seemed, in an endless tangle. Wire haunted us in our sleep; division fences, cross fences, wire and its barbs wound itself about us in an agony of labor. Below, our Holsteins were

feeding upon high-priced hay; they would continue to eat into our revenue until we could get them to "Squatter's Claim." But before they came, there must be protection against the "shove up", or general concerted movement of the cattle raisers of the community, by which, through the concentration of every effort on the part of ranchmen, homesteaders, cowboys, women and sometimes even children, the cattle for miles around are sent up from the lower country into the ample grazing lands of the Forest Reserve. There, according to classification of fees, they are allowed to feed until such time as the blasts of early-arriving winter shall send them bawling against the division fences in their downward course again. Our claim lay practically in the path of the shove up and shove down. Unless it were fenced, our Holsteins would join the rest and be lost to us; it is practically impossible to find a certain "critter", once it is abroad in the forestry reserve.

So there was the wire, ever before us. The work went quickly where the "quakers" were thick; we merely placed the spool upon a stick and hitched a horse to the loose end, stretching the wire from tree to tree and affixing it with staples. But where the quakers were thin, there were the posts to cut and trim and set, and the post holes to dig, and it was a different task. So I took to the shovel and to the pick and to the ax, even as I had taken to

the plow. True, there had been a day when I would have believed such work impossible. But that day was gone; the labor came quite naturally now.

My face tanned under the steady beat of sun through rarefied atmosphere. My skin slowly roughened from constant contact with the elements and with but practically no relief in the cosmetics which are every woman's fortification. My nose was shiny; no such thing as a powder puff now. One cannot very well carry such articles in the pockets of overalls, or waste time upon them when the work begins with the cooking of breakfast at four-thirty o'clock in the morning, and ends with dragging steps as you hand the last dinner dish to your dull-eyed husband to be dried, more often than not long after ten o'clock at night. And when the red hands are free at last from the dishwater, one looks more eagerly toward the solace of bed than the beautification of lotions.

Lotions! For those hands! They were calloused. They were torn and full of wire cuts. The nails were ragged — broken in place after place. Great scratches marred the skin. My hands — of which I had been so proud. They were only workingman's hands now! One rainy Sunday morning, I stood looking at myself in the glass, trying vainly to picture the other Zora. I thought of my dresses, practically untouched since I had come into this

country. I went to the trunk and touched one of the filmy things which once had been so necessary to my everyday life. Then hot tears sprang to my eyes and I closed the trunk. I had not grasped that dress, yet it had risen with the lifting of my hand. The silk clung to the very roughness of my work-torn skin! And I stood wondering, a great, gaunt fear clutching at my heart, wondering.

"Fred," I asked, when I had gained the courage, "do you notice anything different about me since we've come up here?"

He laid down the work bridle which he had been mending.

"Yes, I do, Honey," he said. "You're a lot stronger than you were. You're getting along fine."

I locked the trunk that evening, that its contents might not give me new fears. After all, they were only dresses. Overalls and hobnailed shoes were what one needed now — and strength!

Strength for the fourteen hours or more of work each day. For the long circles of the shove up, for it had come now, demanding the services of Fred and myself, even though we possessed no range cattle. But the time might come when we would, and one lives in this country by the work one trades. Strength for the hurried trips on horseback, alone over almost impossible distances. A meeting of the scattered members of a Red Cross chapter had made me its chairman, and we felt our duties toward

that vague, invisible monster called "The War", as much as though it were ever before us. Perhaps more, for we were of a new land, making a fight ourselves. We could understand more readily what those sacrifices and dangers across the ocean really meant. Sometimes there were even dangers for us.

I rode one day through the shivering quakers toward the upper trail for far-away Two River, and a meeting there. My head was down, my brain heavy with many things, principal among which was despondency. It was the third of July — time of torrid heat back in the places of ordinary temperatures — but here the wind blew sharp and cold from the white tops of the mountains, and that very morning I had arisen to find my prized garden, which I had counted upon as a guarantee against the food ravages of winter, white with frost. Anxiously I had watched the sun rise and the tender shoots of the garden truck wither with the heat. Now many of the rows which I had labored so hard to nurture were only so many stretches of blackened, lifeless vegetation.

It oppressed me, like the machinations of some mysterious enemy ever upon the alert to strike a blow against Fred and myself. It gave me a feeling of apprehension, of nameless fear. Far across the lower country, along the sea of blue-green sage, the brushers were at work, sending aloft their

trails of smoke from the fires of grubbed sage to make of it all a great, beautiful stage setting; but I saw in it only the menace that a true pioneer would have seen in the smoke of a signal fire. Everything was threatening here; it seemed ominous. The songs of birds filled the air as I rode through the cathedral-like arches of Quaker Knob, the trills of the tiny, yellow wild canaries, equal in note and in volume to any Hartz Roller. Bluebirds, robins, great hawks and woodpeckers kept up their ceaseless soundings; on a rocky ledge, far to the right, a golden eagle screamed. But that day, I seemed to hear only the chattering of the magpies, discussing perhaps, a new victim. The "maggie" is the carrion eater of the hills; and bones are white because he has picked them clean.

Small place, indeed, for one with imagination! For the plodder, yes, the plodder sees but little beyond his own range of vision. But for those who see with something more than the eyes, who can dream, —

My revery ceased abruptly. The horse had reared, wildly, frantically; coming toward us, head lowered, horns aimed straight at the horse's breast, was a tremendous white-faced bull!

There was no escape. In my absent-mindedness, I had done a thing prohibited in cattle countries, that of approaching a bull "head on." Face a lion or tiger, yes, but a bull must be approached from

behind, and thereby "spooked" or frightened. Now, all in an instant, it seemed, he covered the ground and was upon us. There was a frightened scream from the horse, a bellowing from the bull, then the crashing impact of two heavy bodies, and after that another plunge by the horse which sent me tumbling to the ground a good five feet away.

It was physical danger; I had known such all my life. I came to my feet unfrightened, screaming my anger, and in my excess of resentment, rushed for the bull, armed with nothing more than a small club which I had seized as I rose. It was sufficient. My screaming and sudden appearance on foot "spooked" him, and with the rest of his herd, he went crashing into the buck brush, leaving me on foot, ten miles from home, while before me wavered a horse literally gushing blood from the wounds in his breast.

I attended no Red Cross meeting that day. Instead, I stanched the flow of blood as best I could by packing the ugly holes with my handkerchief and pieces torn from my waist. Long after darkness had fallen, I arrived home again, leading my patient, due for many a week of ministration before he could travel again.

But there were other days less eventful, and on those times I rode often as far as fifty to sixty miles in the rounds of the various meetings — to find

efforts continued everywhere. Here some one had loaned their most prized possession, a sewing machine. Another a work table, still others shears and scissors and knitting needles. Faithfully they gathered, these women of the frontier, many of them coming for miles upon the back of a plodding farm horse, their luncheon tied in a sack and hung on the horn of the saddle. Nor were the women all. My chief delight was to watch those cowpunchers who were either too young or too old for the army. More than one grizzled old rider would attend those meetings, and then, outside the meeting house, squat on his heels beside his horse, and determinedly knit away at a sock, meanwhile puffing vigorously at a cigarette. Nor, when the meeting was over, would he leave his "work" until the next week. Instead, he'd stuff it into his poncho, rolled up behind his saddle, knitting needles and all.

"Might git caught out som'ers," he'd explain, "an' want somethin' t' pass th' time with."

More than one soldier wore cowboy-knitted socks as a result!

So passed the summer, and with the autumn there arrived several momentous things. One was the fact that our strip was opened for entry much sooner than any one had imagined, with the result that at six o'clock on the morning of the day designated, Fred and I sat on the courthouse steps at

Roadstop after a forty-two-mile horseback ride that had begun at midnight, to be the first to file on our one hundred and sixty acres, together with an "additional" four hundred and eighty acres, allowed us under the Stock Raising Act. We went home millionaires, as far as land was concerned, but possessors of few riches otherwise. For, in truth, it seemed after all only another liability to add to our others. Those cows, for instance.

They had not sold as we had expected. Young heifers, with their consequent risk on the market, were not in demand. Our speculation had been a failure, and now we were faced with the necessity of finding sufficient hay to feed them through the winter; there had not been even the beginning of a hay crop at what we now called "The Homestead."

A week went by; then came glorious news. Fred had found what he needed at a ranch, five miles down in the lower country. More, we could live in the comfortable ranch house while we were feeding the stock. We were delighted. Only to have that lurking enemy once more in the background. Our change of home was necessitated in the very midst of the "shove down" which we ourselves had been riding. Two of our cows became mingled with the down-moving mass. Day and night we rode in search for them, to find them not. Some one with an interchangeable brand had looked after that. There are still cattle rustlers out

here in the West, no matter what inordinately wise Easterners who decry the passing of the old times may have to say about it.

Only two cows, but they meant a great deal to us. One parts reluctantly with anything when one is on the downward grade. But soon there came relief in the wild careening of a rider making his way through the aspens, shouting to us as soon as he was within range:

"Bring grub to Ridge's Barn! Right away! They've signed an Armistice. War's over! Been blowin' up th' town in Roadstop for two days over it!"

What cared we that the news was two days old? Or any one else, for that matter! Through the first falls of snow we made our way to Ridge's Barn, a good twenty miles away, to find every cowpuncher in the district busily pitching hay, and an excited crowd waiting on the side lines until the loft could be cleared. Then came the celebration — a celebration instituted long after every city and town of the country had settled down to the safe knowledge that the war was over: a "shindig" which lasted with dancing and fiddling and singing and jubilation far into the next day. Then it ceased for us of the soil, but not for the cowboys. Colorado was dry by this time, but Wyoming was still wet, and over the line they went for their "likker", there to whoop it up until their last cent was gone. For

the rest of us, the celebration was over. Winter was creeping on us, cruel even in its first visitations. Soon would come the sweeping blizzards, covering the service brush and scrub oak, whitening the vista of our lives for seven long months. Homeward we went, to the grueling routine of work.

Then came another rider. But how different from the one who had brought the glorious knowledge of the end of the war! Slumped in his saddle, he moved through the quakers, at last to halt his horse, then, sliding to the ground, stagger to the house. His eyes were glazed, his lips cracked from fever, while emaciation already was causing the bones to protrude.

"I've tried to fight it out up in th' shack by th' sawmill," he said. "I can't do it. Can't you take me to town?"

Fred made the journey that night with the stricken man; we had not even attempted to diagnose his malady. Late the next afternoon he returned, a reticent being, silent, morose. For he had seen things at which he quailed. It was the "flu", coming here long after it had died away in other regions.

How it had reached this isolated country, no one knew. How it had penetrated, even to lonely shacks like that in which the cowpuncher had lived, was beyond us. Until now, it had been just some far-away thing about which we had read in

the occasional papers which came into our possession. But now, with the first real blizzards of the winter sweeping, with the loneliness and desolation of life away from the railroad, from the drug-store, even from neighbors, the knowledge of its presence hung like a pall, black, ominous, depressing.

Down in those tents in the sagebrush country, where eager homesteaders of the spring before were still fighting to hold their land, it entered like a bold thing, striking them down in twos and threes and in whole families. There was but little aid for them; the one doctor in Roadstop had become a gaunt being who had almost forgotten when last he had slept. The school there had been turned into a hospital and already was overcrowded by the patients who came from the town itself. And there was nothing for the rest to do but to fight for the health of others as long as they remained immune, then to sink before the invader with no more expert help in their own travail than that which they had given. Such is the pioneer country; hard enough at best, it is ever a lurking enemy, ever waiting to rally to its cause the allies of distance, of isolation and of inconvenience. They died in those tents down by the road; sometimes whole families were wiped out, and the people of the countryside moved stolidly about the task of burying them in makeshift cemeteries, not knowing when they themselves would go. And they

died from other causes than the disease — from privation, from exposure and from hunger! They who crossed the plains in '49 and fought Indians were not the only ones who endured dangers that they might settle a new country. The same sort of thing is still with us upon a dozen frontiers where sparsely settled districts are striving to build themselves into greater communities. The breadth of development may not be there, but the conditions remain. And in such country, the man who settles it, be he rich or be he poor, is after all only a "homesteader."

Our part of the struggle was to furnish milk from our stock of Holsteins, and they came miles for it. Then one night, a neighbor — he lived six miles away — halted at the door.

"Fred," he asked, "if I come back to-night, will you get up in the morning and go out with me to look for a bear?"

Fred, not understanding, hesitated.

"I've got a lot of work to do," he said. The other man turned upon him an expression almost of agony.

"I know it," he said. "And I would n't ask it otherwise. But my folks ain't had anything but this milk for four days now. I thought that maybe if I could get them some fresh meat —"

Fred nodded that he would go. Then the neighbor told it all. Not only was their food gone —

they had but recently come into the country — but their clothing was worn out as well. For four children there was but one pair of shoes!

They went hunting the next morning, and for the first day found nothing but tracks. The next day they shot a porcupine and dragged it proudly to the little "box-car" house of the homesteader. At least there was broth and food. They went forth again, and this time they were rewarded. Bear meat for food. Bear fat for cooking grease, bear hide for moccasins, and the rest of the skin for a comforter. The family of five had lain practically at the point of death for days. But with the shout of victory from without as the men dragged home their kill, a new fight began; such is the effect of food sometimes on those who are starving. But Fred paid for his trip. Four nights later, he staggered in with the milkpails and stood for a moment leaning against the door.

"Can't hold out any longer," he confessed in matter-of-fact tones. "I've had the 'flu' since yesterday."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THEN it was I who went to our neighbor, riding at night through a blizzard. Fred had almost immediately gone into delirium; he was up, about the house, working like a fiend upon silly things. Six miles through blinding white, and six miles back, but the neighbor was with me. Together we put Fred to bed and hid his clothing. The next day the neighbor came again and for the third day. Then I stopped his tiresome journeys.

"I'm going to be the man of the house," I said — and lived true to the task. It was five weeks before Fred could gain his strength again. In that time I had learned many things: to stand upon the running gear of a wagon and guide the destinies of four horses down the precipitous trail to the haystacks at the mesa; to pitch the rack full and return with it to the feeding pens; to milk the cows until my wrists became sore and swollen with the strain; to chop and saw the seemingly endless amounts of wood needed for the house, and then, when the masculine chores were done, to turn to the churning and shaping of butter molds, and at last, with the butter sacked on each side of the saddle, ride the eight miles to the road that it

might be shipped by stage into Roadstop. Strangely enough, it was one of the really enjoyable times of the winter. I was "filling in" — working for some one who could not do it himself. The feeling that some one was dependent, the knowledge that I was accomplishing something made the days shorter as Fred slowly neared the end of his convalescence.

At last it ended. There was only the routine again, and the long nights, in which often we merely sat and stared. The time had gone now when we could find many matters of interest to talk about. Reading had practically ceased; we had found that we cared not a whit what was happening in the outside world. It was our own that counted — the supply of hay, the number of coyotes, the fact that a thousand rabbits, running in line like an army in single file, had broken a way to a haystack and almost devoured it — these were the points of interest, and we talked of them tersely as they happened. The rest of the time we were a taciturn man and a taciturn woman, again prisoners of the snow, waiting the interminable days until the spring should come again.

And then came a new disappointment. April first, and we were told to vacate. To where? There was five feet of snow up at the Homestead. There was no hay elsewhere. Like dumb things, we merely waited to be put out. The owners of the

ranch house came to take possession and asked us why we had not obeyed their orders. We dully answered that there was no place to go. They shrugged their shoulders and gave us the bunk house in which to live, until we could reach the Homestead, meanwhile telling us the latest gossip from town. It was to the effect that the world had gone cattle crazy, that with the end of the war had come a demand for cattle unprecedented in history. It would last for years, with constantly increasing prices. Now was the day of the cattleman!

We listened with blazing eyes. The chance had come at last — the thing we had dreamed about in other days! Fred hurried for Roadstop to investigate. It was true! Even the banks were urging the purchase of cattle; any one who bought ten head with his own money could be backed by the bank for twenty more! Our dreams would come true!

Until almost daylight we talked it over. Then we waited, day after day, for the snow to go, so that we could reach our homestead. At last the time passed and while I went alone into the hills with the two dogs, Fred started forth into Wyoming where cattle could be purchased reasonably.

He took no one with him; there was no one to take. Only those who have lived in pioneer country can realize the dearth of labor and "extra help" when the spring rush is on. Three weeks later he reached the Homestead with his cattle after a

seemingly impossible trip — one of the few men ever to have herded alone a bunch of cattle such as this through the unknown territory of this region.

How proud we were, both of that trip and what Fred had brought with him, good, solid, white-faced steers that would put on weight steadily throughout the summer's grazing.

But when the fall came, there was none of the former elation. The rumors had been wrong. The world had ceased its cattle insanity. The herd for which we had gambled practically every cent we possessed, the herd we had classed as cheap at seventy-five dollars a head or "round", as they are called out here, was not worth fifty! Downward, steadily downward, the cattle market went into a slump from which it seemed impossible to recover. More, our third winter was threatening us now, with its consequent need for hay. We turned again to the ranch on the mesa, only to find that a mortgage had been foreclosed upon it, and that it was for sale only, with no thought of renting.

It had been a dry summer. Crops had been generally a failure. Hay was scarce; already it was bringing thirty dollars a ton, with the knowledge that before the winter was well advanced it would be double that figure. Our crisis had arrived. Everything we possessed in the world had been thrown upon the gaming table, and the odds had turned against us.

It was then that the circus called as it never had called before. Down in Denver was the comfort of winter quarters. Our old jobs were waiting for us — a letter from us and the orders would travel into the printing houses for twenty-four-sheet stands depicting Zora in her old-time den of lions and tigers, or perched upon the tusks of a prancing elephant.

Then I looked in the mirror. I sighed and gave up the thought. The old Zora, it seemed, had departed. Here was another creature, unkempt as so many women of toil were in this country, with hardened skin, with hair which had lost its luster and life, and worst of all, with wrinkles about the corners of my lips where a constant set expression of determination which I did not even know existed, had brought the crow's-feet. I could not be the old Zora again. I was broken — broken! I repeated the word as though it were a condemnation. A broken, slatternly ranch woman, with no incentive to be otherwise. A beast of burden, a slave to a thing that was dragging me down — down.

"Let's try to buy that ranch, Fred," I said. "It'll throw us horribly in debt. But what's the difference?"

We had reached that point. What was the difference? Out of the wreckage only one thing was left — "Zora's Cows." And we would not part

with them — for they were our last resort in case of utter failure.

But at least we could use them for additional security, and on to the gaming table they went, as an evidence of our good will. A week later we moved to our new ranch. We called it ours, at least. It belonged to the bank, until we could pay for it. But there was at least the childish thrill of possession in forgetting that fact, for a few moments at a time!

There was a new ogre before us after that. The interest! It's ten per cent out in this country, where risks are large and where a bank must guard its every resource against constantly recurring loss. The interest! It haunted us like the villain in an ancient melodrama. Our lives revolved about it — interest, mounting monthly, and with the winter upon us!

But there was the sawmill, high above. And a contract to deliver lumber at a spot near the Wyoming line, and no one, so the sawmill man said, to haul it. He had neglected to think of two people: Fred Alispaw and his partner, Zora. I do not use the term wife; I believe all femininity had left me. I was a man, in work, in action, and in brawn. What if the roads were slippery? What if it necessitated rocking atop two thousand piled feet of lumber with the reins practically frozen in one's hands and the four-horse team literally at a

gallop down the precipitous mountain sides that it might keep ahead of the rumbling wagon, thundering on behind it? There was money in it. Fred could do it; he was a man. I could do it, for I was a man too!

Three o'clock in the morning would find us in the crisp snow, hitching our four-horse teams to wagon or sled, as the necessity might need. The darkness of early winter morning would find us at the sawmill, loading. Dawn would creep upon us, as Fred led the way with his team along the dangerous mountain trail, I following with my load — two men, fighting for a home and for a herd of cattle which were then almost unsalable. Beside us, in many places, the road dropped sheer to the creek bottom, fifty or sixty feet below; the distance makes little difference; ten feet would have killed as easily. Thus we rocked along on top of the load which constantly shifted in spite of chains and steel binders, as we swung first to one side then the other that we might balance it, meanwhile attempting to hold our horses and manage the brakes. Then, gravity overcoming us at last, we merely gave the horses rein, and pell-mell, the wheels of the wagon or the skids of the sled sluing dangerously, the snow crunching, the dogs — we had each taken one — literally digging their claws into the wood to hold on, we would go thundering down the last stretch to the smoother

THE RANCH IN WINTER

roads of the level country. And when we finished and were home again, there were the chores. But we did not mind them. We had passed the point where fatigue could matter. Thus another winter of blizzards and agonizing labor went by — to a summer of separate endeavor. For there was the Homestead, and the government demanding that it be occupied for at least five months of the year.

Fred could not go. There was the hay to be grown on the mesa of the new ranch to insure us against the approach of another winter. It was the dogs and myself who "homesteaded" then, and while Fred batched along in scant comfort, I worked at the little place in the hills — on fences, on plowing, on the job of a man.

The garden was only a growing thing. Departed now was the time when I looked upon it with the enthusiasm of a planter. It meant so many potatoes, so many onions, so many turnips, nothing more. The birds sang, but I neither heard them nor saw them — unless they should be sage hens rising at my approach. Then, methodically I spotted the place, so that when the open season came Fred and I might kill them and salt them down for the winter's food. A rabbit in my path meant nothing of beauty as concerned the wild. Ten rabbits easily went into a single jar, once they were properly cooked and spiced for future consumption. Always it was the same; the bitterness of the future,

the necessity of planning, the fight to live! There was no pleasure of the moment: there could be none. For always in the background was lurking the threat of To-morrow!

When the hay grew in the mesa, I went down to assist Fred; sunrise saw me riding to work that I might handle the hayrake and operate the stacker while Fred, atop the stack, spread the hay. Sundown saw my horse making his weary way over the hills to the Homestead — for the government says that the occupation of such a place must be constant during the months required. And all this for cattle whose value still went downward, until it seemed that their hides were more valuable than the flesh beneath them!

Far to the right of us, in the Wyoming country, a man who had been a cattle millionaire watched everything go, paid his debts and then went forth to work as a sheepherder. In Roadstop, another who had been urged by the bank to buy cattle, drove his herd in front of the institution, rounded them into a close group, presented them to the bank and walked away. Down in the sage flats, the homesteader's tents grew sparser, while the covered wagons, one by one, rolled slowly out of the country. Not that it was the fault of the land; but one cannot live when the only possible commodity is toboganning with apparently no stopping place. Cattle outfit after cattle outfit went broke.

Lower and lower went our hopes; more and more desperate became our efforts to hang on. I put down eggs, crock after crock of them, by the lime-water method, that when winter came, I might sell them in Roadstop. When autumn arrived, I worked side by side with Fred in the butcher pens — there was not even time for nausea — then smoked the hams and bacon for sale in the little town. And when there was nothing else to do, I could make cheese and butter; one can always sell that. There was no reserve now. We were battling on the final barrier. Ten per cent. Ten per cent. It hung to us like weary vision to the exclusion of all else.

Save one thing. A wanderer stopped by the cabin one day, a tramp of the hills. He asked to be fed. We complied; people like ourselves think twice before we say "no" to one who is hungry. There was no place for him save at the table where we ate.

He was uncouth. He bent over his food. I hated him. Then I happened to glance at Fred and realized for the first time that work was not the only thing the matter with us. Fred's hand went entirely about his coffee cup. He too was bent over the table.

And myself! My fork was clutched in my left hand, half raised. One elbow was on the table in slouching fashion. I too was grasping my cup — even as that uncouth person who had offended me

was grasping his. Work, work — no thought but work had made its inroads. For three years we had not read. For three years we had given no thought to what the rest of the world was doing. For that space of time, nothing had mattered save the labor in hand, the constant call of the drudge.

And we had gone downward, not only in fortune, not only in appearance, but in nature!

I rose from the table, fighting back the tears. When the man had gone, Fred found me in the sparsely furnished living room, staring out the window toward a mound of earth which the beavers had erected in the creek flowing through our place, staring, hands clenched until the sun-browned knuckles were nearly white.

"What's the matter, Honey?" he asked.

"Nothing," I replied.

It was a lie. I was wondering if the water in that beaver dam were deep enough — and what the folks back on the show would say when they heard about it!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It was not a thought of the moment. The prophecy was working, inexorably, surely, just as I had seen it work in the case of more than one woman who had come into that country since our arrival. One instance was the elopement of an educated woman with a man who had never been more than a churl, an elopement not of love, but of desperation, simply that she might escape a task too great for her. There had been several suicides and a killing — and in the latter it had been the death of a husband, followed by that of the wife as she turned the gun upon herself. There had been other deaths — from disease, superinduced by privation. The rule of the country for those not equipped!

"— or kill yourself!"

Yet it was not the country's fault. It was no one's fault save that of those who, like myself, had come into it with dreams of roses, to find only the thorns. And now I — I who had fought the long fight, was at the threshold.

I said nothing to Fred. I merely kept my own councils and did the only possible thing to fight back. I opened up my trunks. I brought forth my dresses, of which I had been proud once —

now only crumpled, ancient-appearing relics which resembled masquerade costumes far more than they did the pretty things which they had been when I had bought them. But if imagination could work one way, it could work another. I pictured them as in style, and admired them as much as if they had just come from Fifth Avenue. Then deeper into my trunk for my linens; I fondled them and strove to forget that my rough hands grated as they passed over the texture. I was n't thinking of hands now; I was thinking of my brain! Old circus programs came forth to be read and reread, and the bulging press book, filled with clippings which the various newspapers of the United States had printed about me during my professional career. To be frank, I was in search of one thing — the building of an ego!

"I was proud once!" I said between gritted teeth. "They even went so far as to call me an 'imperious Juno of a woman.' Well, I can be proud again; do you hear that?" One falls easily into the habit of talking to oneself in solitary places. "Do you hear that? I can be proud again. I'm not going to be a slattern. I won't — I won't!"

It took far more than one session of introspection to start me on the upward path again. And if you who read this little confession believe it unusual that a woman should deteriorate, not only in looks, but in thoughts, in speech and in man-

nerisms through the environment of nothing but work and loneliness, just try it yourself. Or easier, remember that more than one man, marooned by shipwreck, has been found to be little more than a savage after a year or so. Fred and I were marooned, not on a desert island, it is true, but on something almost as depressing. For three years we had not read a book; we had done little more than glance at newspapers. We had not seen a motion picture, much less a theatrical production. We had talked to absolutely no one about anything save the affairs in hand, the depth of the snow, the condition of the water supply, the fact that they were haying down on Fortification, and that beef cattle still were sagging at the bottom of the market. We had not a single incentive for remembering the niceties; the crudities were calling too insistently. Now I found that we had answered unwittingly, and that something must be done.

I could n't tell Fred that his manners had slipped also. One can realize such a thing oneself, but one does n't like to be told about it. So I began my campaign by calling attention to my own faults. Soon Fred announced that he possessed them too. Then we established a system of fines — as inexorably enforced as though it were a legislative law. For every concession to crudity, either in speech or in manner, we must put twenty-five cents into a fund — to be spent for nothing but foolishness!

Silly? Then put yourself in a place where every cent earned is a serious cent, when one reckons nickels against a time of deliverance, when a rise of even a quarter of a cent in the price of beef meant optimism and hope, and you'll readily see how much twenty-five cents meant to us. Especially, when, upon deeper inspection, we learned that we had fallen into the habits of the farm hand, the prospector, the grizzled mountaineer and the wanderer — for we saw few others — and that our language was plentifully sprinkled with "aint's" and "ain't nots", and "them theres" and such.

But it had its advantages in more ways than one. It gave us a new interest and helped us pass a hopeless winter, a frigid period of fierce blasts but of little snow, presaging danger when the summer came. For there is a blessing in deep snow in this country, in spite of the weariness of the visit. It means water for irrigation when the sun beams hot for the brief span of summer — and water means hay. One learns to gauge one's future by the growth of oats or alfalfa. They mean the difference between success and failure when the cattle go to the sales pens.

Thus the winter passed, with this "diversion", and with the other one of work — for there were the notes to be met, and while Fred labored on the ranch, I turned to the recreating and extending of my market in Roadstop for lard and cheese, and for

another thing highly in demand; my home-cured hams and bacon from our hogs which had been fattened on the abundant corn crops of our scrub oak patches. To sell these meant a weekly round trip of nearly seventy miles, sometimes by wagon and sometimes by sled, dependent upon the weather; alone, of course, except for the faithful company of short-legged little Scotty, perched beside me in sunshine or in blizzard, fair weather or foul, as though she, who had nursed a lion, should not fail in courage at a new emergency.

Little Scotty! Our love for her was something more than the affection of two human beings for a faithful companion. Scotty was far more; she was our link to the past. She was the thing which typified the life which we had left; we felt that through her our old existence was still with us; it saved us more than once from giving up everything and going back to it. Scotty had been rescued by me one snowy day from a dog-pound where she had been granted a respite from death for a day or so, because she had that morning given birth to puppies — then a new respite when I appeared with the news that Beauty, our best lioness, had given birth to a cub and had refused to nurse or even recognize it.

And so Scotty and her puppies had been put into a closed basket and turned over to me, with the announcement that "maybe she'd do." I had

taken her to winter quarters and given into her keeping the baby cub. And she had looked up at me with her big brown eyes — this tiny little short-legged Scotch terrier — as if divining the duty required of her. That night, out in the snowy winter quarters yard, a menagerie man mercifully put four tiny puppies to death that a cub might live. Scotty had become the mother of a lion, to nurse it, to guard it as she would have guarded her own offspring, to wean it, and then, in the same cage with a beast fully twenty times her size, with barkings and sharp nips upon leonine legs, continue her control of it until it was nearly two years of age. Small wonder that we loved her, and small wonder that she was all the company I needed upon those lonely rides into Roadstop, watching over her as I would watch over a child. For there was something in the future which Fred and I could not help but see. Scotty was becoming gray about the mouth and eyes. Our little image of the circus, we knew, weakened by her sacrifice for what is now one of the finest lions in America, could not be with us much longer.

But for the present she was there in all her cocky sagaciousness, and together we made the trips throughout the winter, earning interest money and a slight inroad upon the principal, while Fred, with his cream shipments, his sales of hay here and there, made provisions for the planting in the spring.

But when that spring came, it brought new complications. As I have mentioned, the winter had been a dry one, with the result that when the warmer months did arrive, they brought with them little of the luxuriant growths which were usually present. Every available scrap of grazing land had been sought out by the cattlemen, and an association had been formed, of which Fred was an officer, to insure the best possible grass for those beef, which, though still at low ebb, might be counted upon to be some day the salvation of more than one ranch. For more than a week, I noticed that Fred was becoming more and more taciturn, as though some great weight were on his mind — of which he did not want to tell me. Once, as I came in from feeding the chickens, I noticed him just putting away his six-gun, which he had been oiling. I questioned him.

"Oh, just thought I'd look it over," he said evasively.

But I knew there was something else behind it, and fear clutched me. Was the rule of the country applying to him also? I strove again and again for information, and did not gain it. Then, one afternoon, as we were returning from a week at the Homestead, the truth broke suddenly upon me. Fred had risen in his saddle and was staring far across the mesa toward a small, unfenced strip of our land. Then he settled, dug his spurs deep into

his horse and was away at a gallop. I followed as swiftly as I could, to come upon him leaning from his saddle and glowering at the custodian of a sheep camp which had usurped the grazing upon that land.

"You'll be off of there to-morrow morning, or you won't be able to get off!" he snapped.

The sheepman, a tall, powerful, bullying sort of person, sneered.

"How do you think you're going to do it?"

Fred's eyes narrowed and his shoulders hunched, a mannerism I had seen more than once in the old circus days, when, one man pitted against the ferocious energy of thirty tons of elephant flesh, he had thrown himself against the leader of the herd to prevent a stampede or break-away. He drew his breath slowly, through tight teeth.

"You'll be off this land to-morrow morning," he answered, and turned his horse, while I rode silently beside him on the way back to the house. "That's what's been wrong with me lately," he confessed. "We'd been hearing rumors of it, but we'd hoped they were n't true. Guess it means a war."

A cattle and sheep war! I knew what that meant. There had been enough stories of ancient feuds in this locality for me to realize the seriousness of an invasion by the sheepmen. Our mesa, for instance, had within the last score of years, been the scene

of one of the bloodiest cattle and sheep wars in the history of Colorado; the story had it that the projecting ledge at the lower end had literally dripped blood. And now the sheepmen were trying to come in again!

It meant war. It could mean nothing else. The gulf between the cattleman and the sheepman is a thing that cannot be crossed, for the simple reason that the cattleman cannot live, once the sheepman has taken possession. A beef "critter" will not eat after the ground has been grazed and tramped upon by sheep; neither will it drink where sheep have been. If the sheep come, then the cattle must go.

Added to this, there seems to be a peculiar phase of the industry which renders a sheep man "grass crazy." If he sees a good piece of grazing land he is never satisfied, according to the cattleman's viewpoint, until his sheep are on it, and secure it he will, in spite of every obstacle. It is this which has led to the sheep wars of the past and it will lead to the wars of the present and future, until some regulation is made that cattle and sheep must not be raised in the same locality.

This time, however, it was the inroads of sheepmen from outside the state, driving their flocks over from Utah, which were causing the trouble. I turned and tossed that night in wakefulness until slightly before dawn. Then, with the perversity

of nature, I slept for perhaps an hour, to find upon awakening that Fred was gone. I arose and hurried to the gunrack. His six-gun and holster were gone. A box of cartridges lay open, with a few scattered about, where he evidently had hurriedly taken a handful. I knew what it meant; he had ridden out to make good his threat of the night before.

I dressed as hurriedly as possible, then, running forth to the corral, threw a halter upon my saddle horse and mounted him bareback; there was no time to be lost. If I could only reach there before actual conflict! To that end, I took a short cut of precipitous grades through dense brush which lashed my face and scraped my knees as the horse hurried with none too much care along the twisting trail, at last to come into the open and see before me the sheep camp, still undisturbed.

"Please!" I begged of the flockmaster. "Won't you go? My husband's coming armed, and he means it."

"Does he?" sneered the other man. "Well, we're armed too."

It aroused every fighting instinct within me. The enmity between sheep owner and cattle owner is a primal one. My jaws set — and I suppose my features must have given good indication of the resentment within me.

"Well," I answered, "I've tried to plead with you — simply because I don't want to see you

killed. You know," and I put emphasis into the sentence, "it is n't murder in this country to shoot a rat of a sheepman!"

He looked at me queerly. Suddenly his eyes widened.

"You're that lion-tamin' woman, ain't you?" he asked. I merely answered with a nod. An instant later Fred came riding out of the brush, his right hand moving toward his holster.

"Well," he asked.

"Goin' right out, Brother," said the flock-master. "Goin' right out — an' I don't want you to think that this here is my fault. I just got them there boundary lines mixed up, that's all. Never meant to trespass on your land; never meant it at all."

The old excuse of the sheepman, and Fred knew it. He watched the white-topped wagon until it was well out of sight, then alighting, turned over his horse to me.

"Take him home," he ordered. "It may be a ruse. I'm going to ambush."

With the result that for a week I moved as in a daze. Night and day Fred lay in the sage, his gun ever ready to send into the air the warning shot that would precede an actual battle should the trespassers attempt to return. Night and day, while I remained at home, or crept forth to a cache point where I left his food; a week in which

every minute was an hour, listening for the sound of shots, for the appearance of a gaunt man, now entitled to the epithet of "killer!" True, no jury in this cattle country would convict a man for the salvation of his own properties, but guilt is not always to be determined by twelve good men and true. There is such a thing as Conscience and Realization and a memory of the Ten Commandments. The week passed in agony, finally to give way to new travail.

The sheepmen had not returned to our own property, but they were assembling in great numbers upon land which they had leased, awaiting the time when they could break over and simply confiscate grazing land belonging to homesteaders whom they felt could not resist them. But the scouts of the "Association" had learned of it; now the whole country was aroused, with stern-faced cattlemen riding night and day, and Fred with them.

I have seen pictures of wives bidding their husbands good-by as they went to war. That is an exalted thing. It is different when you see your husband strap on his gun — in defense of his home, it is true, but in defiance of what is known as "law." Day after day I lived in the impending terror of a "sheep war"; there was a sinking feeling, an awful sickening, as I saw him leave to ride with the men, never knowing whether he would

return safe — and even if safe, with another human's blood upon his hands. Yet I let him go; it is the rule of the country.

Throughout the summer, I lived under this tension. At last came the time when the only solution seemed to be that of driving every invading sheepman back over the Utah line. A time was set. Ghostly figures in the darkness, the cattlemen of the Burnt Mountain section rode through the night to their meeting place. They assembled. The orders were given. And then . . . the swift flying figure of a woman, risking her life for the sake of speed.

"The Rangers!" she announced. "They're detraining at Roadstop!"

It meant a much-sought-for thing: the State Rangers, refusing until this time to take any part in the war, had now assembled through the warning of some one that the crisis had reached the point of impending bloodshed. For weeks after that, welcome, green-clad men, with the authority of the State of Colorado behind them, rode the hills of the Burnt Mountain District, holding true to their promise that the overstepping of leases, or trespassing upon any Forest Reserve or other Public Domain by the sheepmen would not be countenanced. That fall, their plans gone astray, the invaders shipped their sheep to market, and another danger was over.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The respite gave us the opportunity for a little excursion which had for us both happiness and sadness, a hello and a good-by, all in one. Fred, one day, came into the house from his trip to the mailbox with the announcement that a small circus was shortly to be in Roadstop. I shrugged my shoulders.

"A lot of time we have for circuses!"

He did not answer in words, but merely nodded toward the diminutive Scotty — the only one left of our circus dogs, since Puppy had died only a few months before. Decline had been rapid of late; one siege of sickness had been overcome only to lead to another; she rarely left her bed behind the kitchen stove, and then only to go to the door and stand staring outward, as if watching for a thing which she never again would see.

But she would — even if it meant work until late at night for us to make up the time lost; and ten days later Fred and Scotty and myself, jolting along in a heavy farm wagon, set forth to Roadstop to see the circus. Foolish sentimentality, perhaps — but one clings so to things when there is loneliness everywhere!

We reached the show; it was a fair and carnival more than a circus. For two glorious days we

wandered about the place, Fred and Scotty and I, and I believe of the three, Scotty enjoyed it the most. There was a lion, and she stood and barked at it. Fred and I wondered whether she was trying to tell it that she knew all about lions, that she ought to, since she'd mothered one. She pranced to the playing of the band, and Fred and I watched her, smiling through our tears. We knew she would never hear another, that this was her last circus, her good-by.

A few weeks later, just before the first snow of the winter, we placed her in a box which Fred had built, and which I had padded, tearing up one of the satin dresses left from other days to make a fit bed for her. We tied her brightest ribbon about her neck, and covered her with the tinselled blanket which had been hers in more showy circus days. After a time, Fred went gloomily forth, to return with his arms filled with frost-tinted leaves, and branches of red berries, and colored wild-rose pods. We placed these upon the blanket, then silently we nailed into the little box the last rays of the sunset, and carried little Scotty down by the rushing waters of the mountain stream where the trout leaped and played.

And to you hundreds of thousands who have read of her in fiction and in fact, for her name has been in every magazine of prominence in America, there sleeps "Scotty of the Circus", her ears pointed

forward as though listening for the sound of the band, one tiny foot raised as she often raised it before she made her rushing leap at Kaiser, her lion puppy, when Kaiser and her little mother Scotty were the features of the menagerie. The little grave is heaped with heavy logs to keep the predatory coyotes and wolves from disturbing her sleep. And many a day afterward, Fred and I would go down there and merely sit, dreaming. For this meant more to us than the grave of a dog. It was our sole connection with the outside world, our bond which had tied us to a life where no one labors forever without applause.

That autumn was more solitary than ever. Fred went to Denver with a few head of the older cattle and sold them — prices were beginning to rise slightly now — for enough to pay our interest and a little on the principal, saving a small amount for emergency. But not enough. The fates were still aligned on the side of the enemy.

Again it was a dry winter, with ceaseless winds which were worse than snow. Day and night they whined and howled about the cabin until the nerves of Fred and myself were on the uttermost edge. We snapped at each other upon the slightest provocation; there came the time when, by mutual consent, we kept away from each other as much as possible — that we might evade the law of the land. Spring came, still dry, and sum-

mer followed, two weeks ahead of its usual schedule. The leaves on the scrub oak were lifeless. The various berries bloomed profusely, then parched with scanty production. The flow of water from the high hills became smaller and smaller; for a long time there was barely enough for irrigation; then it ceased altogether.

Down in the lower country, the constantly moving plows turned up little more than dust; the stream which flowed through the center of the sagebrush area was hardly larger than a trickling stream, in a setting of gray 'dobe mud. The sage hens, parched for water, crowded in upon the little ranches, until, when the first mail airplane went over, they rose in such numbers as to blacken the sun. Countless ground squirrels invaded the cultivated sections, feeding upon the drought-stunted growths, and what the squirrels did not destroy fell to the lot of hordes of jackrabbits.

From the point of the mesa, where Fred and I went each day to watch for the evidences of porcupines — a porcupine can track down as much alfalfa as a large hog — and to take precautions against them in the protection of our meager crop, we could see the white-topped wagons moving along the road which led out of the country, their work in vain, their hopes blasted. They had land, but nothing more, and the fight was lost.

As for us, we had land too, for the final papers

had been drawn on our homestead. It was ours in the fall, there to be used if we cared for it, and strangely enough the grazing there was good — which was fortunate; our increasing herd of cattle would fatten through the summer, at least. When the fall came, Fred took to Denver enough to bring us a thousand dollars — a monstrous sum to us who had seen so little for years. In the meanwhile I rode range like a cowpuncher, fighting away the "dogies" or long-horned, nondescript cattle which had been turned adrift by those unable to feed them, and now were eating the haystacks of any one into whose land they could manage to break their way. The last year of the six allowed me by the law of the land was beginning, and none too auspiciously. If another drought should follow, it might mean trouble.

The banks were beginning to feel the need of a return of money, lent throughout the country. In this wise, it may have been the right and proper thing in other days to blame "the bank" for everything that happened to the "old homestead", but it certainly is not just these days. During those times of stress in the Burnt Mountain Country, there would have been treble the number of failures had it not been for the banks. True, ten per cent interest is a terrific amount. Yet when one is dealing with people who have come from here, there and the other place, where the risk is unusu-

ally large, it inevitably follows that the rate of interest is large too. Notes in this district had been renewed and re-renewed until practically every bank was swamped with frozen credits. There had been trickery on the part of borrowers, collusion between persons who could act as witnesses, so that when a "critter" presumably strayed away and was lost, there could be some one to back up the borrower's statement. Usually the state of being "lost" consisted of the beast falling under the butchering sledge, or being smuggled across the state line and there sold for beef. In any event it happened, and the banks were closing down on their debtors.

I knew that we were good for at least another year. But we could not keep going forever without heavily reducing our principal. And here was a winter coming on, with not enough hay to feed our stock, and with the dogies eating what we had; I railed at them as though they were human beings; I drove them off the mesa and repaired the fences, only that they might break in at a new place. And when Fred returned, my first announcement concerned the dogies.

"We'll get 'em out," he said. "In the meantime, let me tell you about the thousand dollars. I've paid five hundred dollars on the principal, and with the rest I've taken out hay insurance."

"Hay insurance?"

"Yes. Bought oil cake. It's cheap now — twice as cheap as it will be in the spring, when we'll need it. It's bought and paid for and put away for us in Roadstop. We're safe as far as hay's concerned."

I sighed — with satisfaction and with disappointment. There was always something, it seemed, reaching for the money. Yet it was insurance, and there was satisfaction in knowing that cattle were going up. Fred had received more for his shipment than he had paid for them, if the cost of hay were to be discounted. Better that than to sell at a loss, and we now had left nearly treble the herd with which we had started. So there was a bit of optimism for a few days. Then we went forth to clear the ranch of dogies.

It was done. Every bit of fence was repaired. They were shut out of our place, at least, for the winter. Then, as we rode along the ridge toward home, Fred moved suddenly down into the valley to inspect a group of wild horses which had come in with the dogies and been overlooked.

I stayed above, riding slowly, and at last glanced down just in time to see one of the animals which Fred had been attempting to drive toward the gate swing suddenly and kick. Immediately Fred's horse reared and shied, throwing him far to one side in the foot-deep snow. For a moment I waited for him to rise — being thrown from a horse be-

comes a rather common occurrence in a country when one must "break" raw horses to the saddle or to harness, but Fred did not get up, and suddenly filled with fear, I put my spurs to my mount, urging it as swiftly as possible through the deep snow. Fred was gray with pain when I reached him; the blood was spurting from a three-inch gash in his left leg.

"Caught me square," he gasped, nodding toward the vicious wild horse. "Could n't get out of his way. But I'll — I'll — be all right. Help me up."

Through sheer force of will he rose, and, how I do not know, mounted his horse. For, after I had helped him dismount at the house, cut his riding boot from his leg, and stanched the flow of blood from the ugly, deep cut of a small vein, I tried the usual tests I had learned on the circus — then found the strength to tell the truth.

"It's broken, Fred."

He did not answer, and I said no more, for a long time. A broken limb means enough in a city. Thirty miles from a doctor, it amounts to little less than a disaster, to say nothing of the expense: $35 for setting a broken bone, and $1.50 per mile for travel — those are the prices in such isolated districts as ours. But this was not a time for thinking of expense. I dressed hastily and started for the door. Fred turned painfully.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Down to the road. To telephone into Roadstop."

"You're not!"

"But Fred — "

"You're not," he said, and his pain-glazed eyes seemed to bore through me. "You're not going to spend that money. A hundred dollars every time he comes out here, and Lord knows how many trips he'll have to make."

"That is n't the question — "

"It *is* the question!" In his eyes blazed the heroism, the determination which had made him the master of three herds of elephants, even in times of stampede. "I'm not complaining about the pain, am I? Now, you go out and get on your horse. Go up to the sawmill. There's a young fellow there who had a year in medicine before he took up homesteading. You know who I mean — the black-haired one. He wants a start on a cattle herd. He'll do this for a heifer. And I can stand the pain!"

I tried to remonstrate. Fred set his jaws.

"Zora," he said, "either you do what I say, or I'll get out of this bed and walk on that broken bone!"

It was not a threat — merely an announcement. Fred Alispaw had the grit to do it. Hastily I made the promise, then, setting forth in the dusk, rode through the heavy trails to the sawmill. I got my

man and sent him to the house. Then there remained twelve more weary miles to the foothills to find a man to attend to the activities of the feed lot until I should return, for I had errands. Twelve miles back to the ranch and then six to the stage station, groaning with agony at every slow mile of travel as I went into Roadstop for the required gauze and plaster-of-Paris bandages for the setting of the leg. It was the next night before I returned, making a stretch of seventy-two hours which Fred had endured with the large bone of his leg badly broken and the lower part of the break thrown to one side. Seventy-two hours before a broken leg could be set! Such is the frontier. Yet we were fortunate. The doctor in Roadstop had been called out of town in the opposite direction on a case over which Death hovered. Had we been forced to wait for him, it would have been a week.

So, again, I was man of all work, even to the butchering of the hogs, fat from the abundant supply of acorns, and now ready to be made into the hams and bacon to supply the winter livelihood and interest money. Sometimes, now, I wonder how I did it. Then, however, there was little thought expended along that line. It had to be done and that was the end of it.

Christmas day was the one set by our lumberjack doctor — Fred had been right; his fees amounted to one heifer — as the time when my husband could

leave his bed and take his first hobbling journey upon crutches, and I prepared to make a celebration of it. The neighbors did the same, each dropping in, some of them having made a journey of fifteen to twenty miles on snowshoes, with some little delicacy; as a result our table was loaded with the offerings of the Burnt Mountain Country. Among them was a bottle of chokecherry wine, and as I drank my toast, I added a silent one:

"To the last year."

For the sixth year was beginning — the last of that stretch of time since, down at the barn dance, a sparkling-eyed little woman had told me that I had but six years in which to do one of three things; to run away with another man, to kill my husband or to kill myself. As for the other man, he never had existed in fact or in thought; Fred was still my one obsession, just as he had always been. The same was true of the second prophecy. Of the third — a pain shot through me. There had been so many times when death would have been a deliverance, a welcomed thing. And now the sixth year was beginning. Could anything happen which had not happened before? Was I not hardened?

I had learned to sacrifice — even to the extent of my looks. I had become a workman, a laborer, realized the fact, and taken it as a matter of course. I had even stood in the butchering pen, my knife running red, shaking at the very thought of what

I was doing, yet proceeding nevertheless. I had seen my husband ride forth time after time, his six-gun strapped around his waist — then waited hour after hour, not knowing whether he would return dead, or stained with another man's blood. Could there be anything more?

March answered my question, after a January and February which had eclipsed in ferocity of blizzard and depth of snowfall anything which ever had been known in the Burnt Mountain Country. Down in Denver, a great fraternal organization was giving one of the biggest indoor circuses ever held, under the guidance of my old friend, Courtney Ryley Cooper, the author of circus stories, who, when I had been "Zora, the Bravest Woman in the World", had served his time as press agent with my circus. Mr. Cooper had announced that I would return to the ring for that show, performing with my old herd of elephants which he had brought on from the new winter quarters of the circus at Peru, Indiana. I had agreed. Fred and I had dreamed of it for weeks. To go back to the lights, to the music, to see my old herd again and watch them obey my commands. To swing the heavy bull whip, to talk with my old friends again. The Hamiltons would be there, the Hobson Family, whom I had known almost since the day I had gone into the circus world, Gene and Mary Enos, Jack Albion, the funny old

clown — it was to be like a home-coming, a triumphant home-coming! I was to hear applause again. There was to be praise for my efforts. A reward — and who in the world does not desire it! Applause for me — who had not heard it in five years; who had worked and slaved and struggled, with only the blazing sun of summer and the white expanses of winter to look upon my efforts. Applause, lights, the blare and lilt of the music of a real circus band.

But at dawn of the morning of that return, I stood in an old bobsled, threading the reins of a four-horse team, and taking my final orders from Fred; three days before, the thought of Denver had been obliterated; the Continental Divide was choked with snow even beyond the efforts of mountain snowplows backed by as many as five tremendous Mallett engines. Trains to Denver had ceased. On the ranch, a two-weeks' stretch of zero weather, with its consequent drain upon the fuel-flesh of cattle, had resulted in a raid upon the last haystack, which had almost obliterated it. In Roadstop, our supply of oil cake was waiting, a thing of deliverance as far as feed was concerned, for one pound of it is worth six of any hay or grain food, or, as the cowpunchers put it:

"Ef th' critter ain't been dead more 'n twenty-four hours, it'll bring 'er around."

I was the one to get it, for Fred could not leave.

The snows of the last ten days had so banked the fields and trails that he had a constant job of trail breaking, that the cattle might find their way to the feed lots, an operation consisting of a slow journey on foot, followed by a number of horses, thus packing down the trail so that it may be used by less sure-footed cattle.

So, at daylight, I set forth, a swaddled being in flannel shirt, heavy Canadian coat, boots and moleskin breeches, on the way to Roadstop for our treasure — I who was to have made the triumphant return. The sky was overcast, yet there were breaks here and there which indicated a clearing, for which I gave thanks. Thanks, however, which were retracted as I got off the mountain and well on to the main road. A heavy fog had dropped, followed soon by a driving, wet snow. I longed to turn back — one becomes a weather prophet in this country — for I knew this would not cease for at least twenty-four hours. But there was the oil cake, and the need of it up there on the ranch where, lacking it, cattle might starve.

Noon, and I reached a fording, there to chop a hole in the ice for my horses to drink; I hung on their nosebags and then myself ate a frozen sandwich. The storm was growing more fierce now — more of a bite in the wind, more of straightness to the snow driving against me, as though it were being shot from a gigantic pepper gun. We started

anew, the horses and I, against blinding sheets which forced me down into the sled, but which I must face, nevertheless. It was useless to think of turning back now; once off the trail and I would have been marooned there until the storm was over; the horses could not have turned with their burden. The one solitary team which passed, a four-horse "freighter" occupied thirty minutes in shoveling and "tromping" a space wide enough for me to scrape past him — the loaded team always remains upon the road.

Slowly, doggedly, my team dragged along, since the wet snow was now piling up against the front of the sled. I was wet to the skin; the heavy Canadian fur coat was saturated, as well as my shirt and breeches. I had changed gloves twice; now I discarded them entirely. Deeper in the sled I crouched, covering myself with one of the horse blankets, my only hope to make Roadstop before nightfall. If I did not —

Gradually the light began to fade. Darkness was coming on me. I plodded on, at last to make the "big turn" and there give a sigh of thankfulness for the glittering of lights in the distance. Roadstop!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

And what a town, when at last I reached it! A horde of nondescript, miserable animals met me at the edge of the village: half-starved horses, mules, cattle and goats, which halted my progress, like bandits holding up a stage, that they might nose into every part of my sled in their anguished search for food. Within the snowbound little town other animals roamed aimlessly, while mountain burros, with their characteristic curiosity, strove determinedly to get into any store where for a moment the door was left open. The town was practically denuded of food for stock, little other than that which, like my own, had been bought far in advance, being left. The railroad would not be able to break through the blockade at the top of the Continental Divide for days. From every trail leading into the frontier town came miserable homesteading outfits, bony horses dragging wearily in their harness, to approach feed stores, beg for grain or cake, and be met with the reply,—

"Let's see the money first!"

The result was that many turned back, especially those who had hoped for credit. This was a time of stress — it was the money that counted. Those

with money obtained a small amount of grain and turned homeward again, giving their horses perhaps a mouthful to last them upon their grueling journey. And more than one team, undernourished, forced beyond its strength, died in that blizzard before ever home came in sight.

My own fat, well-kept horses excited almost as much comment as though they were unheard-of animals. Crowds gathered about them, stroking them, commenting:

"They must have feed out at Alispaw's!"

It gave me an inkling of what I might expect when I loaded up with my oil cake. In fact, the word already had passed around town that I had feed stored, with the result that my route to the hotel was a thing of constant interruptions and beggings. There was only one thing to do, to wait until late at night, load my oil cake at the rear of the store, drive my team to the lumber yard of a friend where it could be locked and guarded, and then make the start before daylight the next morning. This I did upon a sleep of four hours, and then — into the blizzard again for the raging journey homeward, this time with the handicap of a load, and the fact that the temperature had dropped nearly to zero.

Meanwhile, out on Burnt Mountain, Fred had watched for my return with the setting in of the blizzard, and then, when I did not come back, he

went down to the stage station to telephone into Roadstop for news of me. But the wires were down, and he waited until morning for the stage, coming through, this time, with a rider leading a pack horse on which was piled the mail.

"Think I saw her in Roadstop," said the white figure of the stage man. "Pretty sure. Don't guess she'll start out again 'till this storm dies though. Horses an' critters dead an' dyin' all along the road."

Then I was safe! Fred turned gratefully away and started up the road toward the ranch, only to halt, his mouth wide with horror. Through the swirling white he saw a seventeen-year-old boy, nearly snowblind, leading a horse upon which sat his fourteen-year-old brother, who balanced in his arms the stiffened, blackened corpse of a thirteen-year-old girl! Fred called a query, to be dully answered:

"The Sorenson girl. We've took her old man back to his cabin. He's dead, too. Mrs. Sorenson came over to our house this morning and said the old man and the girl had gone out about ten miles after hay and had n't come back. So I went out on skis and found him down in a draw, stark starin' crazy. Then I went back and got a horse and my brother here, and we tried to load him on it, but he died as we were doing it. We took him to the cabin and came back again. Found the horses a

bit farther on, where they'd given out trying to pull the load. One of 'em's dead. Then up the way, we saw the girl's arm stickin' out of a snowdrift. The old man'd tried to bury her in the snow to keep her warm, but it didn't work. We thought we'd better bring her over here and get help for Mrs. Sorenson and them kids. There ain't any food in the house."

There were only Fred and two other men in the immediate neighborhood and these three, on skis, hastened to the aid of the stricken family. A dead man in the cabin, a rheumatic woman and five small children to be cared for, and starving stock to be recovered; such was their task. On their way they came upon the sled, with the horse which had survived munching at the load. Hurriedly they arranged a smaller sled with a much lighter load, and with the one horse began to drag this to the house. Then at last, after miles of travel over drifted slopes where the snow often lay in depths of twenty-five feet, they came upon the Sorenson cabin, just at dark.

A tiny flicker showed from within. As they entered the door, a grief-dulled woman was hovering over the meager fire. She was barefoot, while five nearly naked, frightened children clung to each other in the corners of the dark rooms of the little two-room "box-car" shack, and beyond the slight partition, lay the body of Jay Sorenson.

There was no food, no fuel save a tiny pile of sagebrush which lay in a corner. Outside, a dozen cattle bawled dolorously in hunger and in cold. The men, cold themselves in this frigid place of death, bestirred themselves for fuel, finally being forced to rip the poles from the corral as well as boards from the shed. Then to the cooking of supplies which they had brought with them. The woman and children ate ravenously — more like animals than humans. And after that came the long watch through the night.

The woman did little but stare and moan and bewail the day that they had left "Nebrasky." The children climbed up to a sort of loft, closed the door behind them and for awhile were silent, but at last screechings and sounds of conflict were heard. Fred climbed the ladder, to find them huddled together in a scanty bit of hay, barely thick enough to cover the floor, with a piece of worn carpeting for a cover, and each fighting for the place in the center. The night wore slowly on. As each of the watchers went out to knock a board from the shed, a miserable cow bawled for food or a hog squealed frantically in its prolonged hunger. Across the brush country the wind shrieked as if with triumph; one comes to humanize such things as winds and blizzards. They are such bitter enemies to the man who must fight them.

Morning came and they roused the dulled

woman, taking her and the half-clad children to the house of a neighbor. Then a pair of homemade skis was found in the cabin and tied together, while, rolled in a quilt, the corpse was put upon them for its long journey over the snow. Revolting? Perhaps so. But this is the story of a winter death in homestead country. Death such as was faced by those who blazed the way across the face of America, that there might be such a thing as the civilization of a present day. The only difference was that this happened in 1923, in a year of airplanes, and radio, and ships that can cross from New York to Cherbourg in less than a week!

The telephone into Roadstop had been repaired now, with the result that when the men reached the stage station and placed the body of the father beside that of the girl, the coroner could be called, and hay and grain, and men to break trail to the stock, sent out by the bank which held the mortgage on the cattle. This done, Fred asked for news of me. Roadstop reported that I had gone, and Fred set forth upon the road in an effort to meet me, only to meet again the stage driver and be told that a number of teams had turned back to Roadstop and that perhaps I was with them.

His own cattle were demanding attention now, and believing me safe in Roadstop, he hurried to the ranch to his neglected work. But the scenes he had witnessed weighed upon him. He pictured

me dead, frozen; the night passed fitfully for him in waiting; in imagining the "hallo" of rescuers in every shriek of the wind; once he even dressed and went down the big hill — he had thought he had heard me crying for him. But there was only the white of the snow, the shrill of ceaseless wind and the swirl of restless white, lifted from the drifts. The downfall itself had ceased now.

As for me — on the long trail and ignorant of the Sorenson tragedy, I plodded wearily along for twelve hours, over awful roads, made doubly dangerous by sudden drifting. Once, for instance, hugging a shelf of rock, the road had become so scaled with drifts that I was forced to stand on the sled runner on the uphill side to hold my load from completely overturning. Again, on a like shelving, where the snow had drifted until the trail had been thrown to the very edge of a precipice, I passed over only to hear a booming behind me like that of a hundred shotguns, and turning, stared at the downrush of an avalanche — where the trail had been. It was long after dark when I cried out with delight at the sight of the lights in the stage station, and wondered why everything should be so brilliant there.

"Hallo!" I cried cheerily, as the door opened and I halted my team. "You've got things bright tonight. Can I stop over?"

There was a nod from the woman.

"If you can get along with seven people and two dead ones," she replied.

Nine people, two of them dead, all in the three rooms of a sod-roofed cabin. But I could not go on. Exhaustion had overtaken me. I looked after my team and staggered within, to hear over and over again the details of the tragedy, and, as if that were not enough, to glimpse the two bodies, faintly visible through the crack of a door that would not close.

The third in a sagging bed, I tried in vain to sleep. The watcher's steps, as he paced the floor to keep warm, sounded like the beating of a hollow drum. And through the crack, with the smoky lamp burning at their heads, showed the two sacrifices to the lure of land, silent, yet shouting, it seemed, their maledictions upon the thing which had led them to death. Again that haunting refrain came to me.

"Stay here six years — "

Morning came. I saw them rolled together in a canvas, while a leather strap was buckled about their necks to hold them together, then placed upon a low flat sled while four half-broken "broncs" were hitched to it, plunging and snorting as though they sensed Death. Then through the snow, a cowpuncher leaning over the reins — dimmer and dimmer in the distance — on their way to Roadstop and a pauper's grave. They who once had dreamed that land would make them rich! As

they left, I too departed, urging my team up the mountain, white now, glistening and calm, like some treacherous Arctic beast, sleeping after his kill. A curve. A figure hurrying along on skis. A glad cry — a joyous answer. It was Fred — to run forward, to clasp me in his arms. God and we alone know the thankfulness we felt.

But once home, the tragedy returned to us. It weighed upon us. Time and again in the years which had passed, we had heard the roll of those who had died from privation, from want, from freezing. But they had been far-away things; we had not been present at the actual suffering. Here, however, was a picture to remain with us, to haunt us, as the spring seethed on in a perfect frenzy of blizzards and snowfall. The roads blocked, only that they might open long enough to entice travelers upon them, then block again. In the lower country, cattle died by the hundreds, horses as well, freezing or starving as the case might be. On some of the larger ranches the cowboys turned, not to feeding — for the hay was gone — but to skinning the carcasses of the dead cattle, while four-horse teams dragged away the hides, all that was left of investments running into tens upon tens of thousands. Day after day it was the same thing: the sun appeared only that it might hide itself against newly massing clouds. Every traveler past our door brought word of some new tragedy,

while, with a sense of impending doom ever above us, Fred and I became more and more taciturn, whole days passing without a word.

It was our last stand, and we knew it. Tragedy weighed upon us, pictures of the dead; this roaring, blustering demon which had descended upon us and would not leave. April came in a whirl of snow and left in a raging blizzard. May advanced through its first week, through its second, into its third, while still about us was the white — everywhere the white, banking itself against the windows, clogging the trails to the feeding pens, choking this entire upper world into silence.

"Stop that hammering, I tell you!" I had screamed it. "Stop that hammering!"

"I was n't hammering!" Fred's voice was nearly as high-pitched as mine. "Can't I tap this heel on my shoe without you screaming at me?"

It had come as suddenly as that. A moment more, hands upraised, we were shouting and screaming at each other, two persons maddened with loneliness, with fatigue, with the steady dragging down of six long years of effort without ever an alleviating pleasure. For perhaps five minutes, we merely stood there, shouting meaningless sentences at each other, recriminations, hasty sarcasms. Then came the outburst.

"Work, work, work! Like some slave! I'm tired of it, I'm done with it! Better to be like those

Sorensons — out of the way and through with it all, than to go dragging on this way."

"Yes — " it was the high-pitched voice of Fred — "and blame me for it. As if — "

"I don't care who's to blame. I want to be through with it. There's no future here; I'm done with it. Done with it, I tell you! I'd rather have oblivion than struggle, and fight and scrimp and —"

Then I stormed out of the room, and as I went, I must have glanced in the direction of the gun rack. For when I returned, the guns were gone, and Fred just coming in the door. When next I saw them, a week later, they again stood on the rack. But they were not the shining, bright things they once had been. There were stains of rust upon lock and barrel — where they had lain hidden for days in a snowdrift.

But, when I returned, there was little thought of where they had gone. I had but one desire; to scream out all the hopelessness, the pent-up suffering which the years had caused for me. Screams met by those of Fred. The break had come. We were raving victims of what is known to those who must endure the solitudes as "Cabin Fever" — a super-hysteria which consumes as though it were a disease. After a time the cabin swirled, then went black, and I fell forward upon my face, knowing nothing more until night, when I found myself in bed, with the lamp turned low and

Fred sitting beside me, smoothing the hair from my brow and comforting me. My fall had brought him to his senses; now, with all the gentleness that this faithful, good man could know, he was striving to make up to me for the answers he had given to my tirade.

Even as my fall had sobered him, his sweetness sobered me. For the week in which I lay ill, every possible moment which he could spare he spent beside me, and out of it came a new, a wonderful understanding. For nearly six years we had ceased to be man and wife; we had been merely two laborers struggling at a task so great that it had taken from us all evidences of affection — even though the love grew stronger with every day. Now all the little things that a woman craves — and a man craves too — came back. We called it our honeymoon.

Then one day Fred came bursting into the room, his face boyish with smiles.

"Honey!" he said. "Raise up and look out the window! It's summer!"

There before me were the flowers, growing at the edge of the drifts. Summer — summer at last, and someway, I felt it was Our Summer!

Winter was done, as such. But not done as concerned the benefits now to be derived from its fierce assaults. High above us, every reservoir was filled; the alfalfa grew as it never had grown before.

A PORTION OF THE RANCH OWNED BY FRED AND LUCIA ALISPAW IN MOFFATT COUNTY, COLORADO

This stretch of grain was plowed, sown and harvested by Fred and Zora, the latter doing the work of a man

Although many about us had lost cattle, ours had come through without the loss of even a yearling, while added to this was the fact that every bearing cow had presented us with a calf.

Once recovered from my illness, I found that I had much more time than in other years — due to the clearing of the homestead thus ending the necessity of my presence there, and the fact that Fred had felt he could part with a few head of cattle to relieve me from the hundred little chores by which I formerly had made "pin money." I found that I even had time to note the arrival of the first bluebirds, making their nest in the bony forest of an enormous pair of elk antlers which hung over the doorway. The robins woke us with songs we never before had heard. I planted vines around the house, and sweet peas. While Fred, remembering the revelation during that spasm of Cabin Fever, would stop on the way in from the corral to bring me a bloom, and stand there like a red-faced boy, waiting to be kissed for it.

Happiness! On the way at last. With the market reports showing a steadily rising market! Autumn, and we rode together to gather our cattle, and found them rolling with fat from the luxuriant growths of the summer. Cattle which were now far more numerous than in the old days, liabilities once, but assets now. They went to market, and "topped it."

Then, grinning, Fred came home and handed me some papers. Our debts were paid, and a nest egg was in the bank. No more the constant fear of sacrificing everything to meet our notes. No more that awful feeling of uncertainty at the sight of any one upon the road, wondering whether it were an emissary, come to foreclose! Free! To call this place our own! To think of something beside the price of butter, the market in Roadstop for home-cured hams. Free!

Later in the winter, Fred went out to gather in the hogs, heavy with fat from an unusual crop of acorns. He selected a number of the best, put them into the sty, then came happily into the house.

"Honey," he said. "The elevator in Roadstop is buying in hogs to make out a load. I can't go — got to gather in the rest of 'em. So you take these in and sell 'em, and whatever you get is yours!"

I gasped at the thought of all that money. I who had not spent ten dollars upon myself in six years. But Fred assured me, with many pattings of the cheeks, that we could afford it. Late the next afternoon, I arrived in Roadstop, perched high upon an odoriferous load of porkers. I sold them. I got the money, fingering it suspiciously as though it might be counterfeit.

All this to spend! Money, for the first time in six years! My first thought was magazines, and I made out a money order for subscriptions which

long ago I had given up as an idle dream. Then to a harness store, for a silver-mounted bit, which I had admired and admired — then turned away from it that I might not be further galled with the knowledge that I could not possess it. And a pair of spurs, also silver-mounted! For Fred, two boxes of cigars and three crates of fresh fruit — we had tasted it but a few times in those long years. And after that, the necessities, with a "hold out" for a dress which would come from Denver. Then, thing of all things, I sent to Denver for our possessions, bringing them out of storage. And when they arrived, then really began our rehabilitation.

Our library, for one thing. Our rugs. Our skins of Bengals, of Nubians, of leopards, every one of which carried a story of other days. Days were spent re-arranging the hitherto gloomy seven-room house with the beautiful things of which we so long had been deprived! Then at Christmas, the last touch.

Fred went to town himself, and brought back the first radio in that part of the country, the thing that would keep us in touch with the world in spite of blizzard or storm or drift of snow. Feverishly we put up the aerial, set up the machine and tuned in.

We heard something weird and strange, a type of music we never before had known. Jazz! Something which had come into the world since we

had gone out of it! A world gone crazy on jazz, so they say. But we had known nothing of it — we who had been living the life of the forty-niners!

The winter sped by. Stacks of hay dotted the mesa, assuring us feed in plenty, no matter how late the spring. And when at last it did come, there was no more need for me to ride behind the plow and disc and seeder, or to act as camp-fire boy beside the pile of burning sagebrush, heating the "irons" for the branding. One day Fred looked at me and grinned.

"Well, you've got the money to do it with," he said; "go ahead. Stay as long as you like."

"Do what?" I parried and he laughed.

"Oh, I've seen you looking at the sign!"

Guiltily the next morning I rode down to catch the stage. As guiltily I walked the streets of Roadstop before I got up the courage to go inside. Roadstop had changed in those six years — to a substantial little town with brick buildings, a library, and sturdy business houses. The drifters and undesirables were gone. The boomers and grafters and crooked land agents had been weeded out. And where one of these get-rich-quick concerns once had flourished was now a well equipped little beauty parlor.

I hesitated upon the step. Fear and misgivings tore at me. At last I gained the courage.

FRED ALISPAW IN THE SADDLE

READY FOR ROUNDUP

Lucia Zora on the veranda of her ranch home

"How long can you stay in town?" the girl asked, after I had told my story.

"Three weeks, if I have to."

She laughed.

"Two will do. You've helped a lot, with what you've done already. All you need's astringent. Now this clay I use — "

Ten days later Fred rode into town, to show me a letter. But first he looked and looked — and looked. The tan was gone. So were the little crow's-feet about the corners of my lips. And my hands were softer; the nails were smooth and round and polished once more.

"They'll want you sure now!" he said. The letter was from a circus, offering us a contract. But I shook my head.

"It's a lot of money. But let's think, Fred."

The next day we tore up the letter, then, like children upon a holiday, we visited the picture houses, the first we had seen in six and a half years. A Chautauqua was in session and we looked in on it, drinking in the lectures like starved souls. Then came the joy of nosing into new books at the library, the concerts at the Armory, the mulling over the magazine racks, while Fred puffed contentedly upon cigars that were something more than rope. And after that —

Simultaneously we felt it. A pull toward the hills. A desire to get back up there in the moun-

tains again, to our 2400-acre ranch — for such had the various ramifications of adversity made of it through the various deals we had been pulled into — and the home that was rapidly becoming a show place. We wanted to go home; to hurry back "just to see if everything was all right."

But when we got there, we spent but little time on inspection. Instead, we stood outside the house, looking over a hundred-acre field of waving oats toward the Wasatch Mountains. The sun was setting, with a peculiar cloud formation which turned the ragged world of the distance for the moment into a crumpled thing of purple and blue and gray and gold. Fred's hand touched mine, and I clasped it.

"It's ours," he said, looking over the waving grain to the distant mesa and the valley between. A strange feeling almost of reverence overcame me.

"Ours!" I answered softly.

THE END

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Zora.

Sawdust and solitude.

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